CERTAIN PEOPLE

EDITH WHARTON

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CERTAIN PEOPLE

By EDITH WHARTON

CERTAIN PEOPLE

HUDSON RIVER BRACKETED

THE CHILDREN

TWILIGHT SLEEP

HERE AND BEYOND

THE MOTHER'S RECOMPENSE

OLD NEW YORK

- False Dawn
- The Old Maid
- The Spark
- New Year's Day

THE GLIMPSES OF THE MOON

THE AGE OF INNOCENCE

SUMMER

THE REEF

THE MARNE

FRENCH WAYS AND THEIR MEANING

CERTAIN PEOPLE

BY

EDITH WHARTON

WITHDRAWN

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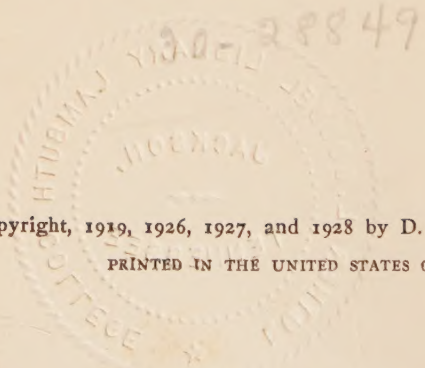

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To

EDWARD SHELDON

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ATROPHY

I

NORA FRENWAY settled down furtively in her corner of the Pullman and, as the express plunged out of the Grand Central Station, wondered at herself for being where she was. The porter came along. "Ticket?" "Westover." She had instinctively lowered her voice and glanced about her. But neither the porter nor her nearest neighbours—fortunately none of them known to her—seemed in the least surprised or interested by the statement that she was travelling to Westover.

Yet what an earth-shaking announcement it was! Not that she cared, now; not that anything mattered except the one overwhelming fact which had convulsed her life, hurled her out of her easy velvet-lined rut, and flung her thus naked to the public scrutiny. . . Cautiously, again, she glanced about her to make doubly sure that there was no one, absolutely no one, in the Pullman whom she knew by sight.

Her life had been so carefully guarded, so inwardly conventional in a world where all the outer conventions were tottering, that no one had ever known she had a lover. No one—of that she was absolutely

sure. All the circumstances of the case had made it necessary that she should conceal her real life—her only real life—from everyone about her; from her half-invalid irascible husband, his prying envious sisters, and the terrible monumental old chieftainess, her mother-in-law, before whom all the family quailed and humbugged and fibbed and fawned.

What nonsense to pretend that nowadays, even in big cities, in the world's greatest social centres, the severe old-fashioned standards had given place to tolerance, laxity and ease! You took up the morning paper, and you read of girl bandits, movie-star divorces, "hold-ups" at balls, murder and suicide and elopement, and a general welter of disjointed disconnected impulses and appetites; then you turned your eyes onto your own daily life, and found yourself as cribbed and cabined, as beset by vigilant family eyes, observant friends, all sorts of embodied standards, as any white-muslin novel heroine of the 'sixties!

In a different way, of course. To the casual eye Mrs. Frenway herself might have seemed as free as any of the young married women of her group. Poker playing, smoking, cocktail drinking, dancing, painting, short skirts, bobbed hair and the rest—when had these been denied to her? If by any outward sign she had differed too markedly from her kind—lengthened her skirts, refused to play for money, let her

hair grow, or ceased to make up—her husband would have been the first to notice it, and to say: "Are you ill? What's the matter? How queer you look! What's the sense of making yourself conspicuous?" For he and his kind had adopted all the old inhibitions and sanctions, blindly transferring them to a new ritual, as the receptive Romans did when strange gods were brought into their temples. . .

The train had escaped from the ugly fringes of the city, and the soft spring landscape was gliding past her: glimpses of green lawns, budding hedges, pretty irregular roofs, and miles and miles of alluring tarred roads slipping away into mystery. How often she had dreamed of dashing off down an unknown road with Christopher!

Not that she was a woman to be awed by the conventions. She knew she wasn't. She had always taken their measure, smiled at them—and conformed. On account of poor George Frenway, to begin with. Her husband, in a sense, was a man to be pitied; his weak health, his bad temper, his unsatisfied vanity, all made him a rather forlornly comic figure. But it was chiefly on account of the two children that she had always resisted the temptation to do anything reckless. The least self-betrayal would have been the end of everything. Too many eyes were watching her, and her husband's family was so strong, so united—when there was anybody for them to hate—and at

all times so influential, that she would have been defeated at every point, and her husband would have kept the children.

At the mere thought she felt herself on the brink of an abyss. "The children are my religion," she had once said to herself; and she had no other.

Yet here she was on her way to Westover. . . Oh, what did it matter now? That was the worst of it—it was too late for anything between her and Christopher to matter! She was sure he was dying. The way in which his cousin, Gladys Brincker, had blurted it out the day before at Kate Salmer's dance: "You didn't know—poor Kit? Thought you and he were such pals! Yes; awfully bad, I'm afraid. Return of the old trouble! I know there've been two consultations—they had Knowlton down. They say there's not much hope; and nobody but that forlorn frightened Jane mounting guard. . ."

Poor Christopher! His sister Jane Aldis, Nora suspected, forlorn and frightened as she was, had played in his life a part nearly as dominant as Frenway and the children in Nora's. Loyally, Christopher always pretended that she didn't; talked of her indulgently as "poor Jenny". But didn't she, Nora, always think of her husband as "poor George"? Jane Aldis, of course, was much less self-assertive, less demanding, than George Frenway; but perhaps for that very reason she would appeal

all the more to a man's compassion. And somehow, under her unobtrusive air, Nora had—on the rare occasions when they met—imagined that Miss Aldis was watching and drawing her inferences. But then Nora always felt, where Christopher was concerned, as if her breast were a pane of glass through which her trembling palpitating heart could be seen as plainly as holy viscera in a reliquary. Her sober after-thought was that Jane Aldis was just a dowdy self-effacing old maid whose life was filled to the brim by looking after the Westover place for her brother, and seeing that the fires were lit and the rooms full of flowers when he brought down his friends for a week-end.

Ah, how often he had said to Nora: "If I could have you to myself for a week-end at Westover"—quite as if it were the easiest thing imaginable, as far as his arrangements were concerned! And they had even pretended to discuss how it could be done. But somehow she fancied he said it because he knew that the plan, for her, was about as feasible as a week-end in the moon. And in reality her only visits to Westover had been made in the company of her husband, and that of other friends, two or three times, at the beginning. . . For after that she wouldn't. It was three years now since she had been there.

Gladys Brincker, in speaking of Christopher's ill-

ness, had looked at Nora queerly, as though suspecting something. But no—what nonsense! No one had ever suspected Nora Frenway. Didn't she know what her friends said of her? "Nora? No more temperament than a lamp-post. Always buried in her books. . . Never very attractive to men, in spite of her looks." Hadn't she said that of other women, who perhaps, in secret, like herself. . . ?

The train was slowing down as it approached a station. She sat up with a jerk and looked at her wrist-watch. It was half-past two, the station was Ockham; the next would be Westover. In less than an hour she would be under his roof, Jane Aldis would be receiving her in that low panelled room full of books, and she would be saying—what would she be saying?

She had gone over their conversation so often that she knew not only her own part in it but Miss Aldis's by heart. The first moments would of course be painful, difficult; but then a great wave of emotion, breaking down the barriers between the two anxious women, would fling them together. She wouldn't have to say much, to explain; Miss Aldis would just take her by the hand and lead her upstairs to the room.

That room! She shut her eyes, and remembered other rooms where she and he had been together in their joy and their strength. . . No, not that; she

must not think of that now. For the man she had met in those other rooms was dying; the man she was going to was some one so different from that other man that it was like a profanation to associate their images. . . And yet the man she was going to was her own Christopher, the one who had lived in her soul; and how his soul must be needing hers, now that it hung alone on the dark brink! As if anything else mattered at such a moment! She neither thought nor cared what Jane Aldis might say or suspect; she wouldn't have cared if the Pullman had been full of prying acquaintances, or if George and all George's family had got in at that last station.

She wouldn't have cared a fig for any of them. Yet at the same moment she remembered having felt glad that her old governess, whom she used to go and see twice a year, lived at Ockham—so that if George did begin to ask questions, she could always say: "Yes, I went to see poor old Fraülein; she's absolutely crippled now. I shall have to give her a Bath chair. Could you get me a catalogue of prices?" There wasn't a precaution she hadn't thought of—and now she was ready to scatter them all to the winds. . .

Westover—*Junction!*

She started up and pushed her way out of the train. All the people seemed to be obstructing her, putting bags and suit-cases in her way. And the

express stopped for only two minutes. Suppose she should be carried on to Albany?

Westover Junction was a growing place, and she was fairly sure there would be a taxi at the station. There was one—she just managed to get to it ahead of a travelling man with a sample case and a new straw hat. As she opened the door a smell of damp hay and bad tobacco greeted her. She sprang in and gasped: "To Oakfield. You know? Mr. Aldis's place near Westover."

II

It began exactly as she had expected. A surprised parlour maid—why surprised?—showed her into the low panelled room that was so full of his presence, his books, his pipes, his terrier dozing on the shabby rug. The parlour maid said she would go and see if Miss Aldis could come down. Nora wanted to ask if she were with her brother—and how he was. But she found herself unable to speak the words. She was afraid her voice might tremble. And why should she question the parlour maid, when in a moment, she hoped, she was to see Miss Aldis?

The woman moved away with a hushed step—the step which denotes illness in the house. She did not immediately return, and the interval of waiting in that room, so strange yet so intimately known, was

a new torture to Nora. It was unlike anything she had imagined. The writing table with his scattered pens and letters was more than she could bear. His dog looked at her amicably from the hearth, but made no advances; and though she longed to stroke him, to let her hand rest where Christopher's had rested, she dared not for fear he should bark and disturb the peculiar hush of that dumb watchful house. She stood in the window and looked out at the budding shrubs and the bulbs pushing up through the swollen earth.

"This way, please."

Her heart gave a plunge. Was the woman actually taking her upstairs to his room? Her eyes filled, she felt herself swept forward on a great wave of passion and anguish. . . But she was only being led across the hall into a stiff lifeless drawing-room—the kind that bachelors get an upholsterer to do for them, and then turn their backs on forever. The chairs and sofas looked at her with an undisguised hostility, and then resumed the moping expression common to furniture in unfrequented rooms. Even the spring sun slanting in through the windows on the pale marquetry of a useless table seemed to bring no heat or light with it.

The rush of emotion subsided, leaving in Nora a sense of emptiness and apprehension. Supposing Jane Aldis should look at her with the cold eyes of

this resentful room? She began to wish she had been friendlier and more cordial to Jane Aldis in the past. In her intense desire to conceal from everyone the tie between herself and Christopher she had avoided all show of interest in his family; and perhaps, as she now saw, excited curiosity by her very affectation of indifference.

No doubt it would have been more politic to establish an intimacy with Jane Aldis; and today, how much easier and more natural her position would have been! Instead of groping about—as she was again doing—for an explanation of her visit, she could have said: "My dear, I came to see if there was anything in the world I could do to help you."

She heard a hesitating step in the hall—a hushed step like the parlour maid's—and saw Miss Aldis pause near the half-open door. How old she had grown since their last meeting! Her hair, untidily pinned up, was gray and lanky. Her eyelids, always reddish, were swollen and heavy, her face sallow with anxiety and fatigue. It was odd to have feared so defenseless an adversary. Nora, for an instant, had the impression that Miss Aldis had wavered in the hall to catch a glimpse of her, take the measure of the situation. But perhaps she had only stopped to push back a strand of hair as she passed in front of a mirror.

"Mrs. Frenway—how good of you!" She spoke in a cool detached voice, as if her real self were elsewhere and she were simply an automaton wound up to repeat the familiar forms of hospitality. "Do sit down," she said.

She pushed forward one of the sulky arm-chairs, and Nora seated herself stiffly, her hand-bag clutched on her knee, in the self-conscious attitude of a country caller.

"I came—"

"So good of you," Miss Aldis repeated. "I had no idea you were in this part of the world. Not the slightest."

Was it a lead she was giving? Or did she know everything, and wish to extend to her visitor the decent shelter of a pretext? Or was she really so stupid—

"You're staying with the Brinckers, I suppose. Or the Northrups? I remember the last time you came to lunch here you motored over with Mr. Frenway from the Northrups'. That must have been two years ago, wasn't it?" She put the question with an almost sprightly show of interest.

"No—three years," said Nora, mechanically.

"Was it? As long ago as that? Yes—you're right. That was the year we moved the big fern-leaved beech. I remember Mr. Frenway was interested in tree moving, and I took him out to show him where

the tree had come from. He *is* interested in tree moving, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes; very much."

"We had those wonderful experts down to do it. 'Tree doctors,' they call themselves. They have special appliances, you know. The tree is growing better than it did before they moved it. But I suppose you've done a great deal of transplanting on Long Island."

"Yes. My husband does a good deal of transplanting."

"So you've come over from the Northrups'? I didn't even know they were down at Maybrook yet. I see so few people."

"No; not from the Northrups'."

"Oh—the Brinckers'? Hal Brincker was here yesterday, but he didn't tell me you were staying there."

Nora hesitated. "No. The fact is, I have an old governess who lives at Ockham. I go to see her sometimes. And so I came on to Westover—" She paused, and Miss Aldis interrogated brightly: "Yes?" as if prompting her in a lesson she was repeating.

"Because I saw Gladys Brincker the other day, and she told me that your brother was ill."

"Oh." Miss Aldis gave the syllable its full weight, and set a full stop after it. Her eyebrows went up,

as if in a faint surprise. The silent room seemed to close in on the two speakers, listening. A resuscitated fly buzzed against the sunny window pane. "Yes; he's ill," she conceded at length.

"I'm so sorry; I . . . he has been . . . such a friend of ours . . . so long . . ."

"Yes; I've often heard him speak of you and Mr. Frenway." Another full stop sealed this announcement. ("No, she knows nothing," Nora thought.) "I remember his telling me that he thought a great deal of Mr. Frenway's advice about moving trees. But then you see our soil is so different from yours. I suppose Mr. Frenway has had your soil analyzed?"

"Yes; I think he has."

"Christopher's always been a great gardener."

"I hope he's not—not very ill? Gladys seemed to be afraid—"

"Illness is always something to be afraid of, isn't it?"

"But you're not—I mean, not anxious . . . not seriously?"

"It's so kind of you to ask. The doctors seem to think there's no particular change since yesterday."

"And yesterday?"

"Well, yesterday they seemed to think there might be."

"A change, you mean?"

"Well, yes."

"A change—I hope for the better?"

"They said they weren't sure; they couldn't say."

The fly's buzzing had become so insistent in the still room that it seemed to be going on inside of Nora's head, and in the confusion of sound she found it more and more difficult to regain a lead in the conversation. And the minutes were slipping by, and upstairs the man she loved was lying. It was absurd and lamentable to make a pretense of keeping up this twaddle. She would cut through it, no matter how.

"I suppose you've had—a consultation?"

"Oh, yes; Dr. Knowlton's been down twice."

"And what does he—"

"Well; he seems to agree with the others."

There was another pause, and then Miss Aldis glanced out of the window. "Why, who's that driving up?" she enquired. "Oh, it's your taxi, I suppose, coming up the drive."

"Yes. I got out at the gate." She dared not add: "For fear the noise might disturb him."

"I hope you had no difficulty in finding a taxi at the Junction?"

"Oh, no; I had no difficulty."

"I think it was so kind of you to come—not even knowing whether you'd find a carriage to bring you out all this way. And I know how busy you are.

There's always so much going on in town, isn't there, even at this time of year?"

"Yes; I suppose so. But your brother—"

"Oh, of course my brother won't be up to any sort of gaiety; not for a long time."

"A long time; no. But you do hope—"

"I think everybody about a sick bed ought to hope, don't you?"

"Yes; but I mean—"

Nora stood up suddenly, her brain whirling. Was it possible that she and that woman had sat thus facing each other for half an hour, piling up this conversational rubbish, while upstairs, out of sight, the truth, the meaning of their two lives hung on the frail thread of one man's intermittent pulse? She could not imagine why she felt so powerless and baffled. What had a woman who was young and handsome and beloved to fear from a dowdy and insignificant old maid? Why, the antagonism that these very graces and superiorities would create in the other's breast, especially if she knew they were all spent in charming the being on whom her life depended. Weak in herself, but powerful from her circumstances, she stood at bay on the ruins of all that Nora had ever loved. "How she must hate me —and I never thought of it," mused Nora, who had imagined that she had thought of everything where her relation to her lover was concerned. Well, it

was too late now to remedy her omission; but at least she must assert herself, must say something to save the precious minutes that remained and break through the stifling web of platitudes which her enemy's tremulous hand was weaving around her.

"Miss Aldis—I must tell you—I came to see—"

"How he was? So very friendly of you. He would appreciate it, I know. Christopher is so devoted to his friends."

"But you'll—you'll tell him that I—"

"Of course. That you came on purpose to ask about him. As soon as he's a little bit stronger."

"But I mean—now?"

"Tell him now that you called to enquire? How good of you to think of that too! Perhaps tomorrow morning, if he's feeling a little bit brighter. . ."

Nora felt her lips drying as if a hot wind had parched them. They would hardly move. "But now—now—today." Her voice sank to a whisper as she added: "Isn't he conscious?"

"Oh, yes; he's conscious; he's perfectly conscious." Miss Aldis emphasized this with another of her long pauses. "He shall certainly be told that you called." Suddenly she too got up from her seat and moved toward the window. "I must seem dreadfully inhospitable, not even offering you a cup of tea. But the fact is, perhaps I ought to tell you—if you're thinking of getting back to Ockham this afternoon there's

only one train that stops at the Junction after three o'clock." She pulled out an old-fashioned enamelled watch with a wreath of roses about the dial, and turned almost apologetically to Mrs. Frenway. "You ought to be at the station by four o'clock at the latest; and with one of those old Junction taxis . . . I'm so sorry; I know I must appear to be driving you away." A wan smile drew up her pale lips.

Nora knew just how long the drive from Westover Junction had taken, and understood that she was being delicately dismissed. Dismissed from life—from hope—even from the dear anguish of filling her eyes for the last time with the face which was the one face in the world to her! ("But then she does know everything," she thought.)

"I mustn't make you miss your train, you know."

"Miss Aldis, is he—has he seen any one?" Nora hazarded in a painful whisper.

"Seen any one? Well, there've been all the doctors—five of them! And then the nurses. Oh, but you mean friends, of course. Naturally." She seemed to reflect. "Hal Brincker, yes; he saw our cousin Hal yesterday—but not for very long."

Hal Brincker! Nora knew what Christopher thought of his Brincker cousins—blighting bores, one and all of them, he always said. And in the extremity of his illness the one person privileged to see him had been—Hal Brincker! Nora's eyes filled;

she had to turn them away for a moment from Miss Aldis's timid inexorable face.

"But today?" she finally brought out.

"No. Today he hasn't seen any one; not yet." The two women stood and looked at each other; then Miss Aldis glanced uncertainly about the room. "But couldn't I— Yes, I ought at least to have asked you if you won't have a cup of tea. So stupid of me! There might still be time. I never take tea myself." Once more she referred anxiously to her watch. "The water is sure to be boiling, because the nurses' tea is just being taken up. If you'll excuse me a moment I'll go and see."

"Oh, no; no!" Nora drew in a quick sob. "How can you? . . . I mean, I don't want any. . ."

Miss Aldis looked relieved. "Then I shall be quite sure that you won't reach the station too late." She waited again, and then held out a long stony hand. "So kind—I shall never forget your kindness. Coming all this way, when you might so easily have telephoned from town. Do please tell Mr. Frenway how I appreciated it. You will remember to tell him, won't you? He sent me such an interesting collection of pamphlets about tree moving. I should like him to know how much I feel his kindness in letting you come." She paused again, and pulled in her lips so that they became a narrow thread, a mere line drawn across her face by a ruler. "But, no; I

won't trouble you; I'll write to thank him myself." Her hand ran out to an electric bell on the nearest table. It shrilled through the silence, and the parlour maid appeared with a stage-like promptness.

"The taxi, please? Mrs. Frenway's taxi."

The room became silent again. Nora thought: "Yes; she knows everything." Miss Aldis peeped for the third time at her watch, and then uttered a slight unmeaning laugh. The blue-bottle banged against the window, and once more it seemed to Nora that its sonorities were reverberating inside her head. They were deafeningly mingled there with the explosion of the taxi's reluctant starting-up and its convulsed halt at the front door. The driver sounded his horn as if to summon her.

"He's afraid too that you'll be late!" Miss Aldis smiled.

The smooth slippery floor of the hall seemed to Nora to extend away in front of her for miles. At its far end she saw a little tunnel of light, a miniature maid, a toy taxi. Somehow she managed to travel the distance that separated her from them, though her bones ached with weariness, and at every step she seemed to be lifting a leaden weight. The taxi was close to her now, its door was open, she was getting in. The same smell of damp hay and bad tobacco greeted her. She saw her hostess standing on the threshold. "To the Junction, driver—back

to the Junction," she heard Miss Aldis say. The taxi began to roll toward the gate. As it moved away Nora heard Miss Aldis calling: "I'll be sure to write and thank Mr. Frenway."

A BOTTLE OF PERRIER

I

A TWO days' struggle over the treacherous trails in a well-intentioned but short-winded "flivver", and a ride of two more on a hired mount of unamiable temper, had disposed young Medford, of the American School of Archæology at Athens, to wonder why his queer English friend, Henry Almodham, had chosen to live in the desert.

Now he understood.

He was leaning against the roof parapet of the old building, half Christian fortress, half Arab palace, which had been Almodham's pretext; or one of them. Below, in an inner court, a little wind, rising as the sun sank, sent through a knot of palms the rain-like rattle so cooling to the pilgrims of the desert. An ancient fig tree, enormous, exuberant, writhed over a whitewashed well-head, sucking life from what appeared to be the only source of moisture within the walls. Beyond these, on every side, stretched away the mystery of the sands, all golden with promise, all livid with menace, as the sun alternately touched or abandoned them.

Young Medford, somewhat weary after his journey from the coast, and awed by his first intimate sense of the omnipresence of the desert, shivered and drew back. Undoubtedly, for a scholar and a misogynist, it was a wonderful refuge; but one would have to be, incurably, both.

"Let's take a look at the house," Medford said to himself, as if speedy contact with man's handiwork were necessary to his reassurance.

The house, he already knew, was empty save for the quick cosmopolitan man-servant, who spoke a sort of palimpsest Cockney lined with Mediterranean tongues and desert dialects—English, Italian or Greek, which was he?—and two or three burnoused underlings who, having carried Medford's bags to his room, had relieved the place of their gliding presences. Mr. Almodham, the servant told him, was away; suddenly summoned by a friendly chief to visit some unexplored ruins to the south, he had ridden off at dawn, too hurriedly to write, but leaving messages of excuse and regret. That evening late he might be back, or next morning. Meanwhile Mr. Medford was to make himself at home.

Almodham, as young Medford knew, was always making these archæological explorations; they had been his ostensible reason for settling in that remote place, and his desultory search had already resulted

in the discovery of several early Christian ruins of great interest.

Medford was glad that his host had not stood on ceremony, and rather relieved, on the whole, to have the next few hours to himself. He had had a malarial fever the previous summer, and in spite of his cork helmet he had probably caught a touch of the sun; he felt curiously, helplessly tired, yet deeply content.

And what a place it was to rest in! The silence, the remoteness, the illimitable air! And in the heart of the wilderness green leafage, water, comfort—he had already caught a glimpse of wide wicker chairs under the palms—a humane and welcoming habitation. Yes, he began to understand Almodham. To anyone sick of the Western fret and fever the very walls of this desert fortress exuded peace.

As his foot was on the ladder-like stair leading down from the roof, Medford saw the man-servant's head rising toward him. It rose slowly and Medford had time to remark that it was sallow, bald on the top, diagonally dented with a long white scar, and ringed with thick ash-blond hair. Hitherto Medford had noticed only the man's face—youngish, but sallow also—and been chiefly struck by its wearing an odd expression which could best be defined as surprise.

The servant, moving aside, looked up, and Medford perceived that his air of surprise was produced by the fact that his intensely blue eyes were rather wider open than most eyes, and fringed with thick ash-blond lashes; otherwise there was nothing noticeable about him.

"Just to ask—what wine for dinner, sir? Champagne, or—"

"No wine, thanks."

The man's disciplined lips were played over by a faint flicker of deprecation or irony, or both.

"Not any at all, sir?"

Medford smiled back. "It's not out of respect for Prohibition." He was sure that the man, of whatever nationality, would understand that; and he did.

"Oh, I didn't suppose, sir—"

"Well, no; but I've been rather seedy, and wine's forbidden."

The servant remained incredulous. "Just a little light Moselle, though, to colour the water, sir?"

"No wine at all," said Medford, growing bored. He was still in the stage of convalescence when it is irritating to be argued with about one's dietary.

"Oh—what's your name, by the way?" he added, to soften the curtness of his refusal.

"Gosling," said the other unexpectedly, though Medford didn't in the least know what he had expected him to be called.

"You're English, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You've been in these parts a good many years, though?"

Yes, he had, Gosling said; rather too long for his own liking; and added that he had been born at Malta. "But I know England well too." His deprecating look returned. "I will confess, sir, I'd like to have 'ad a look at Wembley.* Mr. Almodham 'ad promised me—but there—" As if to minimize the *abandon* of this confidence, he followed it up by a ceremonious request for Medford's keys, and an enquiry as to when he would like to dine. Having received a reply, he still lingered, looking more surprised than ever.

"Just a mineral water, then, sir?"

"Oh, yes—anything."

"Shall we say a bottle of Perrier?"

Perrier in the desert! Medford smiled assentingly, surrendered his keys and strolled away.

The house turned out to be smaller than he had imagined, or at least the habitable part of it; for above this towered mighty dilapidated walls of yellow stone, and in their crevices clung plaster chambers, one above the other, cedar-beamed, crimson-

* The famous exhibition at Wembley, near London, took place in 1924.

shuttered but crumbling. Out of this jumble of masonry and stucco, Christian and Moslem, the latest tenant of the fortress had chosen a cluster of rooms tucked into an angle of the ancient keep. These apartments opened on the uppermost court, where the palms chattered and the fig tree coiled above the well. On the broken marble pavement, chairs and a low table were grouped, and a few geraniums and blue morning-glories had been coaxed to grow between the slabs.

A white-skirted boy with watchful eyes was watering the plants; but at Medford's approach he vanished like a wisp of vapour.

There was something vaporous and insubstantial about the whole scene; even the long arcaded room opening on the court, furnished with saddlebag cushions, divans with gazelle skins and rough indigenous rugs; even the table piled with old *Timeses* and ultra-modern French and English reviews—all seemed, in that clear mocking air, born of the delusion of some desert wayfarer.

A seat under the fig tree invited Medford to doze, and when he woke the hard blue dome above him was gemmed with stars and the night breeze gossiped with the palms.

Rest—beauty—peace. Wise Almodham!

II

Wise Almodham! Having carried out—with somewhat disappointing results—the excavation with which an archæological society had charged him twenty-five years ago, he had lingered on, taken possession of the Crusaders' stronghold, and turned his attention from ancient to mediæval remains. But even these investigations, Medford suspected, he prosecuted only at intervals, when the enchantment of his leisure did not lie on him too heavily.

The young American had met Henry Almodham at Luxor the previous winter; had dined with him at old Colonel Swordsley's, on that perfumed starlit terrace above the Nile; and, having somehow awakened the archæologist's interest, had been invited to look him up in the desert the following year.

They had spent only that one evening together, with old Swordsley blinking at them under memory-laden lids, and two or three charming women from the Winter Palace chattering and exclaiming; but the two men had ridden back to Luxor together in the moonlight, and during that ride Medford fancied he had puzzled out the essential lines of Henry Almodham's character. A nature saturnine yet sentimental; chronic indolence alternating with spurts of highly intelligent activity; gnawing self-distrust soothed by intimate self-appreciation; a craving for

complete solitude coupled with the inability to tolerate it for long.

There was more, too, Medford suspected; a dash of Victorian romance, gratified by the setting, the remoteness, the inaccessibility of his retreat, and by being known as *the* Henry Almodham—"the one who lives in a Crusaders' castle, you know"—the gradual imprisonment in a pose assumed in youth, and into which middle age had slowly stiffened; and something deeper, darker, too, perhaps, though the young man doubted that; probably just the fact that living in that particular way had brought healing to an old wound, an old mortification, something which years ago had touched a vital part and left him writhing. Above all, in Almodham's hesitating movements and the dreaming look of his long well-featured brown face with its shock of gray hair, Medford detected an inertia, mental and moral, which life in this castle of romance must have fostered and excused.

"Once here, how easy not to leave!" he mused, sinking deeper into his deep chair.

"Dinner, sir," Gosling announced.

The table stood in an open arch of the living-room; shaded candles made a rosy pool in the dusk. Each time he emerged into their light the servant, white-jacketed, velvet-footed, looked more competent and more surprised than ever. Such dishes, too—the cook also a Maltese? Ah, they were geniuses, these

Maltese! Gosling bridled, smiled his acknowledgment, and started to fill the guest's glass with Chablis.

"No wine," said Medford patiently.

"Sorry, sir. But the fact is—"

"You said there was Perrier?"

"Yes, sir; but I find there's none left. It's been awfully hot, and Mr. Almodham has been and drank it all up. The new supply isn't due till next week. We 'ave to depend on the caravans going south."

"No matter. Water, then. I really prefer it."

Gosling's surprise widened to amazement. "Not water, sir? Water—in these parts?"

Medford's irritability stirred again. "Something wrong with your water? Boil it then, can't you? I won't—" He pushed away the half-filled wineglass.

"Oh—boiled? Certainly, sir." The man's voice dropped almost to a whisper. He placed on the table a succulent mess of rice and mutton, and vanished.

Medford leaned back, surrendering himself to the night, the coolness, the ripple of wind in the palms.

One agreeable dish succeeded another. As the last appeared, the diner began to feel the pangs of thirst, and at the same moment a beaker of water was placed at his elbow. "Boiled, sir, and I squeezed a lemon into it."

"Right. I suppose at the end of the summer your water gets a bit muddy?"

"That's it, sir. But you'll find this all right, sir."

Medford tasted. "Better than Perrier." He emptied the glass, leaned back and groped in his pocket. A tray was instantly at his hand with cigars and cigarettes.

"You don't—smoke, sir?"

Medford, for answer, held up his cigar to the man's light. "What do you call this?"

"Oh, just so. I meant the other style." Gosling glanced discreetly at the opium pipes of jade and amber laid out on a low table.

Medford shrugged away the invitation—and wondered. Was that perhaps Almodham's other secret —or one of them? For he began to think there might be many; and all, he was sure, safely stored away behind Gosling's vigilant brow.

"No news yet of Mr. Almodham?"

Gosling was gathering up the dishes with dexterous gestures. For a moment he seemed not to hear. Then—from beyond the candle gleam—"News, sir? There couldn't 'ardly be, could there? There's no wireless in the desert, sir; not like London." His respectful tone tempered the slight irony. "But tomorrow evening ought to see him riding in." Gosling paused, drew nearer, swept one of his swift hands across the table in pursuit of the last crumbs, and added tentatively: "You'll surely be able, sir, to stay till then?"

Medford laughed. The night was too rich in healing; it sank on his spirit like wings. Time vanished, fret and trouble were no more. "Stay? I'll stay a year if I have to!"

"Oh—a year?" Gosling echoed it playfully, gathered up the dessert dishes and was gone.

III

Medford had said that he would wait for Almodham a year; but the next morning he found that such arbitrary terms had lost their meaning. There were no time measures in a place like this. The silly face of his watch told its daily tale to emptiness. The wheeling of the constellations over those ruined walls marked only the revolutions of the earth; the spasmodic motions of man meant nothing.

The very fact of being hungry, that stroke of the inward clock, was minimized by the slightness of the sensation—just the ghost of a pang, that might have been quieted by dried fruit and honey. Life had the light monotonous smoothness of eternity.

Toward sunset Medford shook off this queer sense of otherwhereness and climbed to the roof. Across the desert he spied for Almodham. Southward the Mountains of Alabaster hung like a blue veil lined with light. In the west a great column of fire shot up, spraying into plumy cloudlets which turned the

sky to a fountain of rose-leaves, the sands beneath to gold.

No riders specked them. Medford watched in vain for his absent host till night fell, and the punctual Gosling invited him once more to table.

In the evening Medford absently fingered the ultra-modern reviews—three months old, and already so stale to the touch—then tossed them aside, flung himself on a divan and dreamed. Almodham must spend a lot of time in dreaming; that was it. Then, just as he felt himself sinking down into torpor, he would be off on one of these dashes across the desert in quest of unknown ruins. Not such a bad life.

Gosling appeared with Turkish coffee in a cup cased in filigree.

"Are there any horses in the stable?" Medford suddenly asked.

"Horses? Only what you might call pack-horses, sir. Mr. Almodham has the two best saddle-horses with him."

"I was thinking I might ride out to meet him."

Gosling considered. "So you might, sir."

"Do you know which way he went?"

"Not rightly, sir. The caid's man was to guide them."

"Them? Who went with him?"

"Just one of our men, sir. They've got the two thoroughbreds. There's a third, but he's lame."

Gosling paused. "Do you know the trails, sir? Excuse me, but I don't think I ever saw you here before."

"No," Medford acquiesced, "I've never been here before."

"Oh, then"—Gosling's gesture added: "In that case, even the best thoroughbred wouldn't help you."

"I suppose he may still turn up tonight?"

"Oh, easily, sir. I expect to see you both breakfasting here tomorrow morning," said Gosling cheerfully.

Medford sipped his coffee. "You said you'd never seen me here before. How long have you been here yourself?"

Gosling answered instantly, as though the figures were never long out of his memory: "Eleven years and seven months altogether, sir."

"Nearly twelve years! That's a longish time."

"Yes, it is."

"And I don't suppose you often get away?"

Gosling was moving off with the tray. He halted, turned back, and said with sudden emphasis: "I've never once been away. Not since Mr. Almodham first brought me here."

"Good Lord! Not a single holiday?"

"Not one, sir."

"But Mr. Almodham goes off occasionally. I met him at Luxor last year."

"Just so, sir. But when he's here he needs me for himself; and when he's away he needs me to watch over the others. So you see—"

"Yes, I see. But it must seem to you devilish long."

"It seems long, sir."

"But the others? You mean they're not—wholly trustworthy?"

"Well, sir, they're just Arabs," said Gosling with careless contempt.

"I see. And not a single old reliable among them?"

"The term isn't in their language, sir."

Medford was busy lighting his cigar. When he looked up he found that Gosling still stood a few feet off.

"It wasn't as if it 'adn't been a promise, you know, sir," he said, almost passionately.

"A promise?"

"To let me 'ave my holiday, sir. A promise—agine and agine."

"And the time never came?"

"No, sir. The days just drifted by—"

"Ah. They would, here. Don't sit up for me," Medford added. "I think I shall wait up—wait for Mr. Almodham."

Gosling's stare widened. "Here, sir? Here in the court?"

The young man nodded, and the servant stood still regarding him, turned by the moonlight to a white spectral figure, the unquiet ghost of a patient butler who might have died without his holiday.

"Down here in this court all night, sir? It's a lonely spot. I couldn't 'ear you if you was to call. You're best in bed, sir. The air's bad. You might bring your fever on again."

Medford laughed and stretched himself in his long chair. "Decidedly," he thought, "the fellow needs a change." Aloud he remarked: "Oh, I'm all right. It's you who are nervous, Gosling. When Mr. Almodham comes back I mean to put in a word for you. You shall have your holiday."

Gosling still stood motionless. For a minute he did not speak. "You would, sir, you would?" He gasped it out on a high cracked note, and the last word ran into a laugh—a brief shrill cackle, the laugh of one long unused to such indulgences.

"Thank you, sir. Good night, sir." He was gone.

IV

"You do boil my drinking-water, always?" Medford questioned, his hand clasping the glass without lifting it.

The tone was amicable, almost confidential; Med-

ford felt that since his rash promise to secure a holiday for Gosling he and Gosling were on terms of real friendship.

"Boil it? Always, sir. Naturally." Gosling spoke with a slight note of reproach, as though Medford's question implied a slur—unconscious, he hoped—on their newly established relation. He scrutinized Medford with his astonished eyes, in which a genuine concern showed itself through the glaze of professional indifference.

"Because, you know, my bath this morning—"

Gosling was in the act of receiving from the hands of a gliding Arab a fragrant dish of *kuskus*. Under his breath he hissed to the native: "You damned aboriginy, you, can't you even 'old a dish steady? Ugh!" The Arab vanished before the imprecation, and Gosling, with a calm deliberate hand, set the dish before Medford. "All alike, they are." Fastidiously he wiped a trail of grease from his linen sleeve.

"Because, you know, my bath this morning simply stank," said Medford, plunging fork and spoon into the dish.

"Your bath, sir?" Gosling stressed the word. Astonishment, to the exclusion of all other emotion, again filled his eyes as he rested them on Medford. "Now, I wouldn't 'ave 'ad that 'appen for the world," he said self-reproachfully.

"There's only the one well here, eh? The one in the court?"

Gosling aroused himself from absorbed consideration of the visitor's complaint. "Yes, sir; only the one."

"What sort of a well is it? Where does the water come from?"

"Oh, it's just a cistern, sir. Rain-water. There's never been any other here. Not that I ever knew it to fail; but at this season sometimes it does turn queer. Ask any o' them Arabs, sir; they'll tell you. Liars as they are, they won't trouble to lie about that."

Medford was cautiously tasting the water in his glass. "This seems all right," he pronounced.

Sincere satisfaction was depicted on Gosling's countenance. "I seen to its being boiled myself, sir. I always do. I 'ope that Perrier'll turn up tomorrow, sir."

"Oh, tomorrow"—Medford shrugged, taking a second helping. "Tomorrow I may not be here to drink it."

"What—going away, sir?" cried Gosling.

Medford, wheeling round abruptly, caught a new and incomprehensible look in Gosling's eyes. The man had seemed to feel a sort of dog-like affection for him; had wanted, Medford could have sworn, to keep him on, persuade him to patience and delay;

yet now, Medford could equally have sworn, there was relief in his look, satisfaction, almost, in his voice.

"So soon, sir?"

"Well, this is the fifth day since my arrival. And as there's no news yet of Mr. Almodham, and you say he may very well have forgotten all about my coming—"

"Oh, I don't say that, sir; not forgotten! Only, when one of those old piles of stones takes 'old of him, he does forget about the time, sir. That's what I meant. The days drift by—'e's in a dream. Very likely he thinks you're just due now, sir." A small thin smile sharpened the lustreless gravity of Gosling's features. It was the first time that Medford had seen him smile.

"Oh, I understand. But still—" Medford paused. Through the spell of inertia laid on him by the drowsy place and its easeful comforts his instinct of alertness was struggling back. "It's odd—"

"What's odd?" Gosling echoed unexpectedly, setting the dried dates and figs on the table.

"Everything," said Medford.

He leaned back in his chair and glanced up through the arch at the lofty sky from which noon was pouring down in cataracts of blue and gold. Almodham was out there somewhere under that canopy of fire,

perhaps, as the servant said, absorbed in his dream. The land was full of spells.

"Coffee, sir?" Gosling reminded him. Medford took it.

"It's odd that you say you don't trust any of these fellows—these Arabs—and yet that you don't seem to feel worried at Mr. Almodham's being off God knows where, all alone with them."

Gosling received this attentively, impartially; he saw the point. "Well, sir, no—you wouldn't understand. It's the very thing that can't be taught, when to trust 'em and when not. It's 'ow their interests lie, of course, sir; and their religion, as they call it." His contempt was unlimited. "But even to begin to understand why I'm not worried about Mr. Almodham, you'd 'ave to 'ave lived among them, sir, and you'd 'ave to speak their language."

"But I—" Medford began. He pulled himself up short and bent above his coffee.

"Yes, sir?"

"But I've travelled among them more or less."

"Oh, travelled!" Even Gosling's intonation could hardly conciliate respect with derision in his reception of this boast.

"This makes the fifth day, though," Medford continued argumentatively. The midday heat lay heavy even on the shaded side of the court, and the sinews of his will were weakening.

"I can understand, sir, a gentleman like you 'aving other engagements—being pressed for time, as it were," Gosling reasonably conceded.

He cleared the table, committed its freight to a pair of Arab arms that just showed and vanished, and finally took himself off while Medford sank into the divan. A land of dreams. . .

The afternoon hung over the place like a great velarium of cloth-of-gold stretched across the battlements and drooping down in ever slacker folds upon the heavy-headed palms. When at length the gold turned to violet, and the west to a bow of crystal clasping the dark sands, Medford shook off his sleep and wandered out. But this time, instead of mounting to the roof, he took another direction.

He was surprised to find how little he knew of the place after five days of loitering and waiting. Perhaps this was to be his last evening alone in it. He passed out of the court by a vaulted stone passage which led to another walled enclosure. At his approach two or three Arabs who had been squatting there rose and melted out of sight. It was as if the solid masonry had received them.

Beyond, Medford heard a stamping of hoofs, the stir of a stable at night-fall. He went under another archway and found himself among horses and mules. In the fading light an Arab was rubbing down one

of the horses, a powerful young chestnut. He too seemed about to vanish; but Medford caught him by the sleeve.

"Go on with your work," he said in Arabic.

The man, who was young and muscular, with a lean Bedouin face, stopped and looked at him.

"I didn't know your Excellency spoke our language."

"Oh, yes," said Medford.

The man was silent, one hand on the horse's restless neck, the other thrust into his woollen girdle. He and Medford examined each other in the faint light.

"Is that the horse that's lame?" Medford asked.

"Lame?" The Arab's eyes ran down the animal's legs. "Oh, yes; lame," he answered vaguely.

Medford stooped and felt the horse's knees and fetlocks. "He seems pretty fit. Couldn't he carry me for a canter this evening if I felt like it?"

The Arab considered; he was evidently perplexed by the weight of responsibility which the question placed on him.

"Your Excellency would like to go for a ride this evening?"

"Oh, just a fancy. I might or I might not." Medford lit a cigarette and offered one to the groom, whose white teeth flashed his gratification. Over the

shared match they drew nearer and the Arab's diffidence seemed to lessen.

"Is this one of Mr. Almodham's own mounts?" Medford asked.

"Yes, sir; it's his favourite," said the groom, his hand passing proudly down the horse's bright shoulder.

"His favourite? Yet he didn't take him on this long expedition?"

The Arab fell silent and stared at the ground.

"Weren't you surprised at that?" Medford queried.

The man's gesture declared that it was not his business to be surprised.

The two remained without speaking while the quick blue night descended.

At length Medford said carelessly: "Where do you suppose your master is at this moment?"

The moon, unperceived in the radiant fall of day, had now suddenly possessed the world, and a broad white beam lay full on the Arab's white smock, his brown face and the turban of camel's hair knotted above it. His agitated eyeballs glistened like jewels.

"If Allah would vouchsafe to let us know!"

"But you suppose he's safe enough, don't you? You don't think it's necessary yet for a party to go out in search of him?"

The Arab appeared to ponder this deeply. The question must have taken him by surprise. He flung

a brown arm about the horse's neck and continued to scrutinize the stones of the court.

"When the master is away Mr. Gosling is our master."

"And he doesn't think it necessary?"

The Arab signed: "Not yet."

"But if Mr. Almodham were away much longer—"

The man was again silent, and Medford continued: "You're the head groom, I suppose?"

"Yes, Excellency."

There was another pause. Medford half turned away; then, over his shoulder: "I suppose you know the direction Mr. Almodham took? The place he's gone to?"

"Oh, assuredly, Excellency."

"Then you and I are going to ride after him. Be ready an hour before daylight. Say nothing to any one—Mr. Gosling or anybody else. We two ought to be able to find him without other help."

The Arab's face was all a responsive flash of eyes and teeth. "Oh, sir, I undertake that you and my master shall meet before tomorrow night. And none shall know of it."

"He's as anxious about Almodham as I am," Medford thought; and a faint shiver ran down his back. "All right. Be ready," he repeated.

He strolled back and found the court empty of life,

but fantastically peopled by palms of beaten silver and a white marble fig tree.

"After all," he thought irrelevantly, "I'm glad I didn't tell Gosling that I speak Arabic."

He sat down and waited till Gosling, approaching from the living-room, ceremoniously announced for the fifth time that dinner was served.

V

Medford sat up in bed with the jerk which resembles no other. Someone was in his room. The fact reached him not by sight or sound—for the moon had set, and the silence of the night was complete—but by a peculiar faint disturbance of the invisible currents that enclose us.

He was awake in an instant, caught up his electric hand-lamp and flashed it into two astonished eyes. Gosling stood above the bed.

"Mr. Almodham—he's back?" Medford exclaimed.

"No, sir; he's not back." Gosling spoke in low controlled tones. His extreme self-possession gave Medford a sense of danger—he couldn't say why, or of what nature. He sat upright, looking hard at the man.

"Then what's the matter?"

"Well, sir, you might have told me you talk Arabic"—Gosling's tone was now wistfully reproach-

ful—"before you got 'obnobbing with that Selim. Making randy-voos with 'im by night in the desert."

Medford reached for his matches and lit the candle by the bed. He did not know whether to kick Gosling out of the room or to listen to what the man had to say; but a quick movement of curiosity made him determine on the latter course.

"Such folly! First I thought I'd lock you in. I might 'ave." Gosling drew a key from his pocket and held it up. "Or again I might 'ave let you go. Easier than not. But there was Wembley."

"Wembley?" Medford echoed. He began to think the man was going mad. One might, so conceivably, in that place of postponements and enchantments! He wondered whether Almodham himself were not a little mad—if, indeed, Almodham were still in a world where such a fate is possible.

"Wembley. You promised to get Mr. Almodham to give me an 'oliday—to let me go back to England in time for a look at Wembley. Every man 'as 'is fancies, 'asn't 'e, sir? And that's mine. I've told Mr. Almodham so, agine and agine. He'd never listen, or only make believe to; say: 'We'll see, now, Gosling, we'll see'; and no more 'eard of it. But you was different, sir. You said it, and I knew you meant it—about my 'oliday. So I'm going to lock you in."

Gosling spoke composedly, but with an under-

thrill of emotion in his queer Mediterranean-Cockney voice.

"Lock me in?"

"Prevent you somehow from going off with that murderer. You don't suppose you'd ever 'ave come back alive from that ride, do you?"

A shiver ran over Medford, as it had the evening before when he had said to himself that the Arab was as anxious as he was about Almodham. He gave a slight laugh.

"I don't know what you're talking about. But you're not going to lock me in."

The effect of this was unexpected. Gosling's face was drawn up into a convulsive grimace and two tears rose to his pale eyelashes and ran down his cheeks.

"You don't trust me, after all," he said plaintively.

Medford leaned on his pillow and considered. Nothing as queer had ever before happened to him. The fellow looked almost ridiculous enough to laugh at; yet his tears were certainly not simulated. Was he weeping for Almodham, already dead, or for Medford, about to be committed to the same grave?

"I should trust you at once," said Medford, "if you'd tell me where your master is."

Gosling's face resumed its usual guarded expression, though the trace of the tears still glittered on it.

"I can't do that, sir."

"Ah, I thought so!"

"Because—'ow do I know?"

Medford thrust a leg out of bed. One hand, under the blanket, lay on his revolver.

"Well, you may go now. Put that key down on the table first. And don't try to do anything to interfere with my plans. If you do I'll shoot you," he added concisely.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't shoot a British subject; it makes such a fuss. Not that I'd care—I've often thought of doing it myself. Sometimes in the sirocco season. That don't scare me. And you shan't go."

Medford was on his feet now, the revolver visible. Gosling eyed it with indifference.

"Then you do know where Mr. Almodham is? And you're determined that I shan't find out?" Medford challenged him.

"Selim's determined," said Gosling, "and all the others are. They all want you out of the way. That's why I've kept 'em to their quarters—done all the waiting on you myself. Now will you stay here? For God's sake, sir! The return caravan is going through to the coast the day after tomorrow. Join it, sir—it's the only safe way! I darsn't let you go with one of our men, not even if you was to swear you'd ride straight for the coast and let this business be."

"This business? What business?"

"This worrying about where Mr. Almodham is, sir. Not that there's anything to worry about. The men all know that. But the plain fact is they've stolen some money from his box, since he's been gone, and if I hadn't winked at it they'd 'ave killed me; and all they want is to get you to ride out after 'im, and put you safe away under a 'eap of sand somewhere off the caravan trails. Easy job. There; that's all, sir. My word it is."

There was a long silence. In the weak candle-light the two men stood considering each other.

Medford's wits began to clear as the sense of peril closed in on him. His mind reached out on all sides into the enfolding mystery, but it was everywhere impenetrable. The odd thing was that, though he did not believe half of what Gosling had told him, the man yet inspired him with a queer sense of confidence as far as their mutual relation was concerned. "He may be lying about Almodham, to hide God knows what; but I don't believe he's lying about Selim."

Medford laid his revolver on the table. "Very well," he said. "I won't ride out to look for Mr. Almodham, since you advise me not to. But I won't leave by the caravan; I'll wait here till he comes back."

He saw Gosling whiten under his sallowness. "Oh, don't do that, sir; I couldn't answer for them if you

was to wait. The caravan'll take you to the coast the day after tomorrow as easy as if you was riding in Rotten Row."

"Ah, then you know that Mr. Almodham won't be back by the day after tomorrow?" Medford caught him up.

"I don't know anything, sir."

"Not even where he is now?"

Gosling reflected. "He's been gone too long, sir, for me to know that," he said from the threshold.

The door closed on him.

Medford found sleep unrecoverable. He leaned in his window and watched the stars fade and the dawn break in all its holiness. As the stir of life rose among the ancient walls he marvelled at the contrast between that fountain of purity welling up into the heavens and the evil secrets clinging bat-like to the nest of masonry below.

He no longer knew what to believe or whom. Had some enemy of Almodham's lured him into the desert and bought the connivance of his people? Or had the servants had some reason of their own for spiriting him away, and was Gosling possibly telling the truth when he said that the same fate would befall Medford if he refused to leave?

Medford, as the light brightened, felt his energy return. The very impenetrableness of the mystery

stimulated him. He would stay, and he would find out the truth.

VI

It was always Gosling himself who brought up the water for Medford's bath; but this morning he failed to appear with it, and when he came it was to bring the breakfast tray. Medford noticed that his face was of a pasty pallor, and that his lids were reddened as if with weeping. The contrast was unpleasant, and a dislike for Gosling began to shape itself in the young man's breast.

"My bath?" he queried.

"Well, sir, you complained yesterday of the water—"

"Can't you boil it?"

"I 'ave, sir."

"Well, then—"

Gosling went out sullenly and presently returned with a brass jug. "It's the time of year—we're dying for rain," he grumbled, pouring a scant measure of water into the tub.

Yes, the well must be pretty low, Medford thought. Even boiled, the water had the disagreeable smell that he had noticed the day before, though of course in a slighter degree. But a bath was a necessity in that climate. He splashed the few cupfuls over himself as best as he could.

He spent the day in rather fruitlessly considering his situation. He had hoped the morning would bring counsel, but it brought only courage and resolution, and these were of small use without enlightenment. Suddenly he remembered that the caravan going south from the coast would pass near the castle that afternoon. Gosling had dwelt on the date often enough, for it was the caravan which was to bring the box of Perrier water.

"Well, I'm not sorry for that," Medford reflected, with a slight shrinking of the flesh. Something sick and viscous, half smell, half substance, seemed to have clung to his skin since his morning bath, and the idea of having to drink that water again was nauseating.

But his chief reason for welcoming the caravan was the hope of finding in it some European, or at any rate some native official from the coast, to whom he might confide his anxiety. He hung about, listening and waiting, and then mounted to the roof to gaze northward along the trail. But in the afternoon glow he saw only three Bedouins guiding laden pack-mules toward the castle.

As they mounted the steep path he recognized some of Almodham's men, and guessed at once that the southward caravan trail did not actually pass under the walls and that the men had been out to meet it, probably at a small oasis behind some fold of the

sand-hills. Vexed at his own thoughtlessness in not foreseeing such a possibility, Medford dashed down to the court, hoping the men might have brought back some news of Almodham, though, as the latter had ridden south, he could at best only have crossed the trail by which the caravan had come. Still, even so, some one might know something, some report might have been heard—since everything was always known in the desert.

As Medford reached the court, angry vociferations, and retorts as vehement, rose from the stable-yard. He leaned over the wall and listened. Hitherto nothing had surprised him more than the silence of the place. Gosling must have had a strong arm to subdue the shrill voices of his underlings. Now they had all broken loose, and it was Gosling's own voice—usually so discreet and measured—which dominated them.

Gosling, master of all the desert dialects, was cursing his subordinates in a half-dozen.

"And you didn't bring it—and you tell me it wasn't there, and I tell you it was, and that you know it, and that you either left it on a sand-heap while you were jawing with some of those slimy fellows from the coast, or else fastened it on to the horse so carelessly that it fell off on the way—and all of you too sleepy to notice. Oh, you sons of females I wouldn't

soil my lips by naming! Well, back you go to hunt it up, that's all!"

"By Allah and the tomb of his Prophet, you wrong us unpardonably. There was nothing left at the oasis, nor yet dropped off on the way back. It was not there, and that is the truth in its purity."

"Truth! Purity! You miserable lot of shirks and liars, you—and the gentleman here not touching a drop of anything but water—as you profess to do, you liquor-swilling humbugs!"

Medford drew back from the parapet with a smile of relief. It was nothing but a case of Perrier—the missing case—which had raised the passions of these grown men to the pitch of frenzy! The anti-climax lifted a load from his breast. If Gosling, the calm and self-controlled, could waste his wrath on so slight a hitch in the working of the commissariat, he at least must have a free mind. How absurd this homely incident made Medford's speculations seem!

He was at once touched by Gosling's solicitude, and annoyed that he should have been so duped by the hallucinating fancies of the East.

Almodham was off on his own business; very likely the men knew where and what the business was; and even if they had robbed him in his absence, and quarrelled over the spoils, Medford did not see what he could do. It might even be that his eccentric host—with whom, after all, he had had but one evening's

acquaintance—repenting of an invitation too rashly given, had ridden away to escape the boredom of entertaining him. As this alternative occurred to Medford it seemed so plausible that he began to wonder if Almodham had not simply withdrawn to some secret suite of that intricate dwelling, and were waiting there for his guest's departure.

So well would this explain Gosling's solicitude to see the visitor off—so completely account for the man's nervous and contradictory behaviour—that Medford, smiling at his own obtuseness, hastily resolved to leave on the morrow. Tranquillized by this decision, he lingered about the court till dusk fell, and then, as usual, went up to the roof. But today his eyes, instead of raking the horizon, fastened on the clustering edifice of which, after six days' residence, he knew so little. Aerial chambers, jutting out at capricious angles, baffled him with closely shuttered windows, or here and there with the enigma of painted panes. Behind which window was his host concealed, spying, it might be, at this very moment on the movements of his lingering guest?

The idea that that strange moody man, with his long brown face and shock of white hair, his half-guessed selfishness and tyranny, and his morbid self-absorption, might be actually within a stone's throw, gave Medford, for the first time, a sharp sense of isolation. He felt himself shut out, unwanted—the

place, now that he imagined someone might be living in it unknown to him, became lonely, inhospitable, dangerous.

"Fool that I am—he probably expected me to pack up and go as soon as I found he was away!" the young man reflected. Yes; decidedly, he would leave the next morning.

Gosling had not shown himself all the afternoon. When at length, belatedly, he came to set the table, he wore a look of sullen, almost surly, reserve which Medford had not yet seen on his face. He hardly returned the young man's friendly "Hallo—dinner?" and when Medford was seated handed him the first dish in silence. Medford's glass remained unfilled till he touched its brim.

"Oh, there's nothing to drink, sir. The men lost the case of Perrier—or dropped it and smashed the bottles. They say it never came. 'Ow do I know, when they never open their 'eathen lips but to lie?" Gosling burst out with sudden violence.

He set down the dish he was handing, and Medford saw that he had been obliged to do so because his whole body was shaking as if with fever.

"My dear man, what does it matter? You're going to be ill," Medford exclaimed, laying his hand on the servant's arm. But the latter, muttering: "Oh, God, if I'd only 'a' gone for it myself," jerked away and vanished from the room.

Medford sat pondering; it certainly looked as if poor Gosling were on the edge of a break-down. No wonder, when Medford himself was so oppressed by the uncanniness of the place. Gosling reappeared after an interval, correct, close-lipped, with the dessert and a bottle of white wine. "Sorry, sir."

To pacify him, Medford sipped the wine and then pushed his chair away and returned to the court. He was making for the fig tree by the well when Gosling, slipping ahead, transferred his chair and wicker table to the other end of the court.

"You'll be better here—there'll be a breeze presently," he said. "I'll fetch your coffee."

He disappeared again, and Medford sat gazing up at the pile of masonry and plaster, and wondering whether he had not been moved away from his favourite corner to get him out of—or into?—the angle of vision of the invisible watcher. Gosling, having brought the coffee, went away and Medford sat on.

At length he rose and began to pace up and down as he smoked. The moon was not yet up, and darkness fell solemnly on the ancient walls. Presently the breeze arose and began its secret commerce with the palms.

Medford went back to his seat; but as soon as he had resumed it he fancied that the gaze of his hidden watcher was jealously fixed on the red spark of his cigar. The sensation became increasingly distaste-

ful; he could almost feel Almodham reaching out long ghostly arms from somewhere above him in the darkness. He moved back into the living-room, where a shaded light hung from the ceiling; but the room was airless, and finally he went out again and dragged his seat to its old place under the fig tree. From there the windows which he suspected could not command him, and he felt easier, though the corner was out of the breeze and the heavy air seemed tainted with the exhalation of the adjoining well.

"The water must be very low," Medford mused. The smell, though faint, was unpleasant; it smirched the purity of the night. But he felt safer there, somehow, farther from those unseen eyes which seemed mysteriously to have become his enemies.

"If one of the men had knifed me in the desert, I shouldn't wonder if it would have been at Almodham's orders," Medford thought. He drowsed.

When he woke the moon was pushing up its ponderous orange disk above the walls, and the darkness in the court was less dense. He must have slept for an hour or more. The night was delicious, or would have been anywhere but there. Medford felt a shiver of his old fever and remembered that Gosling had warned him that the court was unhealthy at night.

"On account of the well, I suppose. I've been sitting too close to it," he reflected. His head ached,

and he fancied that the sweetish foulish smell clung to his face as it had after his bath. He stood up and approached the well to see how much water was left in it. But the moon was not yet high enough to light those depths, and he peered down into blackness.

Suddenly he felt both shoulders gripped from behind and forcibly pressed forward, as if by someone seeking to push him over the edge. An instant later, almost coinciding with his own swift resistance, the push became a strong tug backward, and he swung round to confront Gosling, whose hands immediately dropped from his shoulders.

"I thought you had the fever, sir—I seemed to see you pitching over," the man stammered.

Medford's wits returned. "We must both have it, for I fancied you were pitching me," he said with a laugh.

"Me, sir?" Gosling gasped. "I pulled you back as 'ard as ever—"

"Of course. I know."

"Whatever are you doing here, anyhow, sir? I warned you it was un'ealthy at night," Gosling continued irritably.

Medford leaned against the well-head and contemplated him. "I believe the whole place is unhealthy."

Gosling was silent. At length he asked: "Aren't you going up to bed, sir?"

"No," said Medford, "I prefer to stay here."

Gosling's face took on an expression of dogged anger. "Well, then, I prefer that you shouldn't."

Medford laughed again. "Why? Because it's the hour when Mr. Almodham comes out to take the air?"

The effect of this question was unexpected. Gosling dropped back a step or two and flung up his hands, pressing them to his lips as if to stifle a low outcry.

"What's the matter?" Medford queried. The man's antics were beginning to get on his nerves.

"Matter?" Gosling still stood away from him, out of the rising slant of moonlight.

"Come! Own up that he's here and have done with it!" cried Medford impatiently.

"Here? What do you mean by 'here'? You 'aven't seen 'im, 'ave you?" Before the words were out of the man's lips he flung up his arms again, stumbled forward and fell in a heap at Medford's feet.

Medford, still leaning against the well-head, smiled down contemptuously at the stricken wretch. His conjecture had been the right one, then; he had not been Gosling's dupe after all.

"Get up, man. Don't be a fool! It's not your

fault if I guessed that Mr. Almodham walks here at night—"

"Walks here!" wailed the other, still cowering.

"Well, doesn't he? He won't kill you for owning up, will he?"

"Kill me? Kill me? I wish I'd killed *you!*" Gosling half got to his feet, his head thrown back in ashen terror. "And I might 'ave, too, so easy! You felt me pushing of you over, didn't you? Coming 'ere spying and sniffing—" His anguish seemed to choke him.

Medford had not changed his position. The very abjectness of the creature at his feet gave him an easy sense of power. But Gosling's last cry had suddenly deflected the course of his speculations. Almodham was here, then; that was certain; but just where was he, and in what shape? A new fear scuttled down Medford's spine.

"So you did want to push me over?" he said. "Why? As the quickest way of joining your master?"

The effect was more immediate than he had foreseen.

Gosling, getting to his feet, stood there bowed and shrunken in the accusing moonlight.

"Oh, God—and I 'ad you 'arf over! You know I did! And then—it was what you said about Wembley. So help me, sir, I felt you meant it, and

it 'eld me back." The man's face was again wet with tears, but this time Medford recoiled from them as if they had been drops splashed up by a falling body from the foul waters below.

Medford was silent. He did not know if Gosling were armed or not, but he was no longer afraid; only aghast, and yet shudderingly lucid.

Gosling continued to ramble on half deliriously:

"And if only that Perrier 'ad of come. I don't believe it'd ever 'ave crossed your mind, if only you'd 'ave had your Perrier regular, now would it? But you say 'e walks—and I knew he would! Only—what was I to do with him, with you turning up like that the very day?"

Still Medford did not move.

"And 'im driving me to madness, sir, sheer madness, that same morning. Will you believe it? The very week before you come, I was to sail for England and 'ave my 'oliday, a 'ole month, sir—and I was entitled to six, if there was any justice—a 'ole month in 'Ammersmith, sir, in a cousin's 'ouse, and the chance to see Wembley thoroughly; and then 'e 'eard you was coming, sir, and 'e was bored and lonely 'ere, you understand—'e 'ad to have new excitements provided for 'im or 'e'd go off 'is bat—and when 'e 'eard you were coming, 'e come out of his black mood in a flash and was 'arf crazy with pleasure, and said: 'I'll keep 'im 'ere all winter—a remarkable young

man, Gosling—just my kind.' And when I says to him: 'And 'ow about my 'oliday?' he stares at me with those stony eyes of 'is and says: ' 'Oliday? Oh, to be sure; why, next year—we'll see what can be done about it next year.' Next year, sir, as if 'e was doing me a favour! And that's the way it 'ad been for nigh on twelve years.

"But this time, if you 'adn't 'ave come I do believe I'd 'ave got away, for he was getting used to 'aving Selim about 'im and his 'ealth was never better—and, well, I told 'im as much, and 'ow a man 'ad his rights after all, and my youth was going, and me that 'ad served him so well chained up 'ere like 'is watch-dog, and always next year and next year—and, well, sir, 'e just laughed, sneering-like, and lit 'is cigarette. 'Oh, Gosling, cut it out,' 'e says.

"He was standing on the very spot where you are now, sir; and he turned to walk into the 'ouse. And it was then I 'it 'im. He was a heavy man, and he fell against the well kerb. And just when you were expected any minute—oh, my God!"

Gosling's voice died out in a strangled murmur.

Medford, at his last words, had unvoluntarily shrunk back a few feet. The two men stood in the middle of the court and stared at each other without speaking. The moon, swinging high above the battlements, sent a searching spear of light down into the guilty darkness of the well.

AFTER HOLBEIN

I

ANSON WARLEY had had his moments of being a rather remarkable man; but they were only intermittent; they recurred at ever-lengthening intervals; and between times he was a small poor creature, chattering with cold inside, in spite of his agreeable and even distinguished exterior.

He had always been perfectly aware of these two sides of himself (which, even in the privacy of his own mind, he contemptuously refused to dub a dual personality); and as the rather remarkable man could take fairly good care of himself, most of Warley's attention was devoted to ministering to the poor wretch who took longer and longer turns at bearing his name, and was more and more insistent in accepting the invitations which New York, for over thirty years, had tirelessly poured out on him. It was in the interest of this lonely fidgety unemployed self that Warley, in his younger days, had frequented the gaudiest restaurants and the most glittering Palace Hotels of two hemispheres, subscribed to the most advanced literary and artistic reviews, bought the pic-

tures of the young painters who were being the most vehemently discussed, missed few of the showiest first nights in New York, London or Paris, sought the company of the men and women—especially the women—most conspicuous in fashion, scandal, or any other form of social notoriety, and thus tried to warm the shivering soul within him at all the passing bonfires of success.

The original Anson Warley had begun by staying at home in his little flat, with his books and his thoughts, when the other poor creature went forth; but gradually—he hardly knew when or how—he had slipped into the way of going too, till finally he made the bitter discovery that he and the creature had become one, except on the increasingly rare occasions when, detaching himself from all casual contingencies, he mounted to the lofty water-shed which fed the sources of his scorn. The view from there was vast and glorious, the air was icy but exhilarating; but soon he began to find the place too lonely, and too difficult to get to, especially as the lesser Anson not only refused to go up with him but began to sneer, at first ever so faintly, then with increasing insolence, at this affectation of a taste for the heights.

"What's the use of scrambling up there, anyhow? I could understand it if you brought down anything worth while—a poem or a picture of your own. But just climbing and staring: what does it lead to? Fel-

lows with the creative gift have got to have their occasional Sinaïs; I can see that. But for a mere looker-on like you, isn't that sort of thing rather a pose? You talk awfully well—brilliantly, even (oh, my dear fellow, no false modesty between you and *me,* please!) But who the devil is there to listen to you, up there among the glaciers? And sometimes, when you come down, I notice that you're rather—well, heavy and tongue-tied. Look out, or they'll stop asking us to dine! And sitting at home every evening—brr! Look here, by the way; if you've got nothing better for tonight, come along with me to Chrissy Torrance's—or the Bob Briggses'—or Princess Kate's; anywhere where there's lots of racket and sparkle, places that people go to in Rollses, and that are smart and hot and overcrowded, and you have to pay a lot—in one way or another—to get in."

Once and again, it is true, Warley still dodged his double and slipped off on a tour to remote uncomfortable places, where there were churches or pictures to be seen, or shut himself up at home for a good bout of reading, or just, in sheer disgust at his companion's platitude, spent an evening with people who were doing or thinking real things. This happened seldomer than of old, however, and more clandestinely; so that at last he used to sneak away to spend two or three days with an archæologically-minded friend, or an evening with a quiet scholar, as furtively

as if he were stealing to a lover's tryst; which, as lovers' trysts were now always kept in the limelight, was after all a fair exchange. But he always felt rather apologetic to the other Warley about these escapades—and, if the truth were known, rather bored and restless before they were over. And in the back of his mind there lurked an increasing dread of missing something hot and noisy and overcrowded when he went off to one of his mountain-tops. "After all, that high-brow business has been awfully overdone—now hasn't it?" the little Warley would insinuate, rummaging for his pearl studs, and consulting his flat evening watch as nervously as if it were a railway time-table. "If only we haven't missed something really jolly by all this backing and filling . . ."

"Oh, you poor creature, you! Always afraid of being left out, aren't you? Well—just for once, to humour you, and because I happen to be feeling rather stale myself. But only to think of a sane man's wanting to go to places just because they're hot and smart and overcrowded!" And off they would dash together. . .

II

All that was long ago. It was years now since there had been two distinct Anson Warleys. The

lesser one had made away with the other, done him softly to death without shedding of blood; and only a few people suspected (and they no longer cared) that the pale white-haired man, with the small slim figure, the ironic smile and the perfect evening clothes, whom New York still indefatigably invited, was nothing less than a murderer.

Anson Warley—Anson Warley! No party was complete without Anson Warley. He no longer went abroad now; too stiff in the joints; and there had been two or three slight attacks of dizziness. . . Nothing to speak of, nothing to think of, even; but somehow one dug one's self into one's comfortable quarters, and felt less and less like moving out of them, except to motor down to Long Island for week-ends, or to Newport for a few visits in summer. A trip to the Hot Springs, to get rid of the stiffness, had not helped much, and the ageing Anson Warley (who really, otherwise, felt as young as ever) had developed a growing dislike for the promiscuities of hotel life and the monotony of hotel food.

Yes; he was growing more fastidious as he grew older. A good sign, he thought. Fastidious not only about food and comfort but about people also. It was still a privilege, a distinction, to have him to dine. His old friends were faithful, and the new people fought for him, and often failed to get him;

to do so they had to offer very special inducements in the way of *cuisine*, conversation or beauty. Young beauty; yes, that would do it. He did like to sit and watch a lovely face, and call laughter into lovely eyes. But no dull dinners for *him*, not even if they fed you off gold. As to that he was as firm as the other Warley, the distant aloof one with whom he had—er, well, parted company, oh, quite amicably, a good many years ago. . .

On the whole, since that parting, life had been much easier and pleasanter; and by the time the little Warley was sixty-three he found himself looking forward with equanimity to an eternity of New York dinners.

Oh, but only at the right houses—always at the right houses; that was understood! The right people —the right setting—the right wines. . . He smiled a little over his perennial enjoyment of them; said "Nonsense, Filmore," to his devoted tiresome man-servant, who was beginning to hint that really, every night, sir, and sometimes a dance afterward, was too much, especially when you kept at it for months on end; and Dr. ——

"Oh, damn your doctors!" Warley snapped. He was seldom ill-tempered; he knew it was foolish and upsetting to lose one's self-control. But Filmore began to be a nuisance, nagging him, preaching at him. As if he himself wasn't the best judge. . .

Besides, he chose his company. He'd stay at home any time rather than risk a boring evening. Damned rot, what Filmore had said about his going out every night. Not like poor old Mrs. Jaspar, for instance. . . He smiled self-approvingly as he evoked her tottering image. "That's the kind of fool Filmore takes me for," he chuckled, his good-humour restored by an analogy that was so much to his advantage.

Poor old Evelina Jaspar! In his youth, and even in his prime, she had been New York's chief entertainer—"leading hostess", the newspapers called her. Her big house in Fifth Avenue had been an entertaining machine. She had lived, breathed, invested and reinvested her millions, to no other end. At first her pretext had been that she had to marry her daughters and amuse her sons; but when sons and daughters had married and left her she had seemed hardly aware of it; she had just gone on entertaining. Hundreds, no, thousands of dinners (on gold plate, of course, and with orchids, and all the delicacies that were out of season), had been served in that vast pompous dining-room, which one had only to close one's eyes to transform into a railway buffet for millionaires, at a big junction, before the invention of restaurant trains. . .

Warley closed his eyes, and did so picture it. He lost himself in amused computation of the annual

number of guests, of saddles of mutton, of legs of lamb, of terrapin, canvas-backs, magnums of champagne and pyramids of hot-house fruit that must have passed through that room in the last forty years.

And even now, he thought—hadn't one of old Evelina's nieces told him the other day, half bantering, half shivering at the avowal, that the poor old lady, who was gently dying of softening of the brain, still imagined herself to be New York's leading hostess, still sent out invitations (which of course were never delivered), still ordered terrapin, champagne and orchids, and still came down every evening to her great shrouded drawing-rooms, with her tiara askew on her purple wig, to receive a stream of imaginary guests?

Rubbish, of course—a macabre pleasantry of the extravagant Nelly Pierce, who had always had her joke at Aunt Evelina's expense. . . But Warley could not help smiling at the thought that those dull monotonous dinners were still going on in their hostess's clouded imagination. Poor old Evelina, he thought! In a way she was right. There was really no reason why that kind of standardized entertaining should ever cease; a performance so undiscriminating, so undifferentiated, that one could almost imagine, in the hostess's tired brain, all the dinners she had ever given merging into one Gargantuan pyramid of

food and drink, with the same faces, perpetually the same faces, gathered stolidly about the same gold plate.

Thank heaven, Anson Warley had never conceived of social values in terms of mass and volume. It was years since he had dined at Mrs. Jaspar's. He even felt that he was not above reproach in that respect. Two or three times, in the past, he had accepted her invitations (always sent out weeks ahead), and then chucked her at the eleventh hour for something more amusing. Finally, to avoid such risks, he had made it a rule always to refuse her dinners. He had even—he remembered—been rather funny about it once, when someone had told him that Mrs. Jaspar couldn't understand . . . was a little hurt . . . said it couldn't be true that he always had another engagement the nights she asked him. . . *"True?* Is the truth what she wants? All right! Then the next time I get a 'Mrs. Jaspar requests the pleasure' I'll answer it with a 'Mr. Warley declines the boredom.' Think she'll understand that, eh?" And the phrase became a catchword in his little set that winter. "'Mr. Warley declines the boredom'—good, good, *good!*" "Dear Anson, I do hope you won't decline the boredom of coming to lunch next Sunday to meet the new Hindu Yoghi"—or the new saxophone soloist, or that genius of a mulatto boy who plays negro spirituals on a tooth-

brush; and so on and so on. He only hoped poor old Evelina never heard of it. . .

"Certainly I shall *not* stay at home tonight—why, what's wrong with me?" he snapped, swinging round on Filmore.

The valet's long face grew longer. His way of answering such questions was always to pull out his face; it was his only means of putting any expression into it. He turned away into the bedroom, and Warley sat alone by his library fire. . . Now what did the man see that was wrong with him, he wondered? He had felt a little confusion that morning, when he was doing his daily sprint around the Park (his exercise was reduced to that!); but it had been only a passing flurry, of which Filmore could of course know nothing. And as soon as it was over his mind had seemed more lucid, his eye keener, than ever; as sometimes (he reflected) the electric light in his library lamps would blaze up too brightly after a break in the current, and he would say to himself, wincing a little at the sudden glare on the page he was reading: "That means that it'll go out again in a minute."

Yes; his mind, at that moment, had been quite piercingly clear and perceptive; his eye had passed with a renovating glitter over every detail of the daily scene. He stood still for a minute under the

leafless trees of the Mall, and looking about him with the sudden insight of age, understood that he had reached the time of life when Alps and cathedrals become as transient as flowers.

Everything was fleeting, fleeting . . . yes, that was what had given him the vertigo. The doctors, poor fools, called it the stomach, or high blood-pressure; but it was only the dizzy plunge of the sands in the hour-glass, the everlasting plunge that emptied one of heart and bowels, like the drop of an elevator from the top floor of a sky-scraper.

Certainly, after that moment of revelation, he had felt a little more tired than usual for the rest of the day; the light had flagged in his mind as it sometimes did in his lamps. At Chrissy Torrance's, where he had lunched, they had accused him of being silent, his hostess had said that he looked pale; but he had retorted with a joke, and thrown himself into the talk with a feverish loquacity. It was the only thing to do; for he could not tell all these people at the lunch table that very morning he had arrived at the turn in the path from which mountains look as transient as flowers—and that one after another they would all arrive there too.

He leaned his head back and closed his eyes, but not in sleep. He did not feel sleepy, but keyed up and alert. In the next room he heard Filmore reluctantly, protestingly, laying out his evening clothes.

. . He had no fear about the dinner tonight; a quiet intimate little affair at an old friend's house. Just two or three congenial men, and Elfmann, the pianist (who would probably play), and that lovely Elfrida Flight. The fact that people asked him to dine to meet Elfrida Flight seemed to prove pretty conclusively that he was still in the running! He chuckled softly at Filmore's pessimism, and thought: "Well, after all, I suppose no man seems young to his valet. . . Time to dress very soon," he thought; and luxuriously postponed getting up out of his chair. . .

III

"She's worse than usual tonight," said the day nurse, laying down the evening paper as her colleague joined her. "Absolutely determined to have her jewels out."

The night nurse, fresh from a long sleep and an afternoon at the movies with a gentleman friend, threw down her fancy bag, tossed off her hat and rumpled up her hair before old Mrs. Jaspar's tall toilet mirror. "Oh, I'll settle that—don't you worry," she said brightly.

"Don't you fret her, though, Miss Cress," said the other, getting wearily out of her chair. "We're very well off here, take it as a whole, and I don't want her pressure rushed up for nothing."

Miss Cress, still looking at herself in the glass, smiled reassuringly at Miss Dunn's pale reflection behind her. She and Miss Dunn got on very well together, and knew on which side their bread was buttered. But at the end of the day Miss Dunn was always fagged out and fearing the worst. The patient wasn't as hard to handle as all that. Just let her ring for her old maid, old Lavinia, and say: "My sapphire velvet tonight, with the diamond stars"—and Lavinia would know exactly how to manage her.

Miss Dunn had put on her hat and coat, and crammed her knitting, and the newspaper, into her bag, which, unlike Miss Cress's, was capacious and shabby; but she still loitered undecided on the threshold. "I could stay with you till ten as easy as not. . ." She looked almost reluctantly about the big high-studded dressing-room (everything in the house was high-studded), with its rich dusky carpet and curtains, and its monumental dressing-table draped with lace and laden with gold-backed brushes and combs, gold-stoppered toilet-bottles, and all the charming paraphernalia of beauty at her glass. Old Lavinia even renewed every morning the roses and carnations in the slim crystal vases between the powder boxes and the nail polishers. Since the family had shut down the hot-houses at the uninhabited country place on the Hudson, Miss Cress suspected

that old Lavinia bought these flowers out of her own pocket.

"Cold out tonight?" queried Miss Dunn from the door.

"Fierce. . . Reg'lar blizzard at the corners. Say, shall I lend you my fur scarf?" Miss Cress, pleased with the memory of her afternoon (they'd be engaged soon, she thought), and with the drowsy prospect of an evening in a deep arm-chair near the warm gleam of the dressing-room fire, was disposed to kindliness toward that poor thin Dunn girl, who supported her mother, and her brother's idiot twins. And she wanted Miss Dunn to notice her new fur.

"My! Isn't it too lovely? No, not for worlds, thank you. . ." Her hand on the door-knob, Miss Dunn repeated: "Don't you cross her now," and was gone.

Lavinia's bell rang furiously, twice; then the door between the dressing-room and Mrs. Jaspar's bedroom opened, and Mrs. Jaspar herself emerged.

"Lavinia!" she called, in a high irritated voice; then, seeing the nurse, who had slipped into her print dress and starched cap, she added in a lower tone: "Oh, Miss Lemoine, good evening." Her first nurse, it appeared, had been called Miss Lemoine; and she gave the same name to all the others, quite unaware that there had been any changes in the staff.

"I heard talking, and carriages driving up. Have

people begun to arrive?" she asked nervously. "Where is Lavinia? I still have my jewels to put on."

She stood before the nurse, the same petrifying apparition which always, at this hour, struck Miss Cress to silence. Mrs. Jaspar was tall; she had been broad; and her bones remained impressive though the flesh had withered on them. Lavinia had encased her, as usual, in her low-necked purple velvet dress, nipped in at the waist in the old-fashioned way, expanding in voluminous folds about the hips and flowing in a long train over the darker velvet of the carpet. Mrs. Jaspar's swollen feet could no longer be pushed into the high-heeled satin slippers which went with the dress; but her skirts were so long and spreading that, by taking short steps, she managed (so Lavinia daily assured her) entirely to conceal the broad round tips of her black orthopædic shoes.

"Your jewels, Mrs. Jaspar? Why, you've got them on," said Miss Cress brightly.

Mrs. Jaspar turned her porphyry-tinted face to Miss Cress, and looked at her with a glassy incredulous gaze. Her eyes, Miss Cress thought, were the worst. . . She lifted one old hand, veined and knobbed as a raised map, to her elaborate purple-black wig, groped among the puffs and curls and undulations (queer, Miss Cress thought, that it

never occurred to her to look into the glass), and after an interval affirmed: "You must be mistaken, my dear. Don't you think you ought to have your eyes examined?"

The door opened again, and a very old woman, so old as to make Mrs. Jaspar appear almost young, hobbled in with sidelong steps. "Excuse me, madam. I was downstairs when the bell rang."

Lavinia had probably always been small and slight; now, beside her towering mistress, she looked a mere feather, a straw. Everything about her had dried, contracted, been volatilized into nothingness, except her watchful gray eyes, in which intelligence and comprehension burned like two fixed stars. "Do excuse me, madam," she repeated.

Mrs. Jaspar looked at her despairingly. "I hear carriages driving up. And Miss Lemoine says I have my jewels on; and I know I haven't."

"With that lovely necklace!" Miss Cress ejaculated.

Mrs. Jaspar's twisted hand rose again, this time to her denuded shoulders, which were as stark and barren as the rock from which the hand might have been broken. She felt and felt, and tears rose in her eyes. . .

"Why do you lie to me?" she burst out passionately.

Lavinia softly intervened. "Miss Lemoine meant

how lovely you'll be when you get the necklace on, madam."

"Diamonds, diamonds," said Mrs. Jaspar with an awful smile.

"Of course, madam."

Mrs. Jaspar sat down at the dressing-table, and Lavinia, with eager random hands, began to adjust the *point de Venise* about her mistress's shoulders, and to repair the havoc wrought in the purple-black wig by its wearer's gropings for her tiara.

"Now you do look lovely, madam," she sighed.

Mrs. Jaspar was on her feet again, stiff but incredibly active. ("Like a cat she is," Miss Cress used to relate.) "I do hear carriages—or is it an automobile? The Magraws, I know, have one of those new-fangled automobiles. And now I hear the front door opening. Quick, Lavinia! My fan, my gloves, my handkerchief . . . how often have I got to tell you? I used to have a *perfect* maid—"

Lavinia's eyes brimmed. "That was me, madam," she said, bending to straighten out the folds of the long purple velvet train. ("To watch the two of 'em," Miss Cress used to tell a circle of appreciative friends, "is a lot better than any circus.")

Mrs. Jaspar paid no attention. She twitched the train out of Lavinia's vacillating hold, swept to the door, and then paused there as if stopped by a jerk of her constricted muscles. "Oh, but my diamonds

—you cruel woman, you! You're letting me go down without my diamonds!" Her ruined face puckered up in a grimace like a new-born baby's, and she began to sob despairingly. "Everybody. . . Every . . . body's . . . against me . . ." she wept in her powerless misery.

Lavinia helped herself to her feet and tottered across the floor. It was almost more than she could bear to see her mistress in distress. "Madam, madam —if you'll just wait till they're got out of the safe," she entreated.

The woman she saw before her, the woman she was entreating and consoling, was not the old petrified Mrs. Jaspar with porphyry face and wig awry whom Miss Cress stood watching with a smile, but a young proud creature, commanding and splendid in her Paris gown of amber *moiré*, who, years ago, had burst into just such furious sobs because, as she was sweeping down to receive her guests, the doctor had told her that little Grace, with whom she had been playing all the afternoon, had a diphtheritic throat, and no one must be allowed to enter. "Everybody's against me, everybody . . ." she had sobbed in her fury; and the young Lavinia, stricken by such Olympian anger, had stood speechless, longing to comfort her, and secretly indignant with little Grace and the doctor. . .

"If you'll just wait, madam, while I go down and

ask Munson to open the safe. There's no one come yet, I do assure you. . ."

Munson was the old butler, the only person who knew the combination of the safe in Mrs. Jaspar's bedroom. Lavinia had once known it too, but now she was no longer able to remember it. The worst of it was that she feared lest Munson, who had been spending the day in the Bronx, might not have returned. Munson was growing old too, and he did sometimes forget about these dinner-parties of Mrs. Jaspar's, and then the stupid footman, George, had to announce the names; and you couldn't be sure that Mrs. Jaspar wouldn't notice Munson's absence, and be excited and angry. These dinner-party nights were killing old Lavinia, and she did so want to keep alive; she wanted to live long enough to wait on Mrs. Jaspar to the last.

She disappeared, and Miss Cress poked up the fire, and persuaded Mrs. Jaspar to sit down in an armchair and "tell her who was coming". It always amused Mrs. Jaspar to say over the long list of her guests' names, and generally she remembered them fairly well, for they were always the same—the last people, Lavinia and Munson said, who had dined at the house, on the very night before her stroke. With recovered complacency she began, counting over one after another on her ring-laden fingers: "The Italian Ambassador, the Bishop, Mr. and Mrs. Torring-

ton Bligh, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Amesworth, Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Magraw, Mr. and Mrs. Torrington Bligh . . ." ("You've said them before," Miss Cress interpolated, getting out her fancy knitting—a necktie for her friend—and beginning to count the stitches.) And Mrs. Jaspar, distressed and bewildered by the interruption, had to repeat over and over: "Torrington Bligh, Torrington Bligh," till the connection was re-established, and she went on again swimmingly with "Mr. and Mrs. Fred Amesworth, Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Magraw, Miss Laura Ladew, Mr. Harold Ladew, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Bronx, Mr. and Mrs. Torrington Bl—no, I mean, Mr. Anson Warley. Yes, Mr. Anson Warley; that's it," she ended complacently.

Miss Cress smiled and interrupted her counting. "No, that's *not* it."

"What do you mean, my dear—not it?"

"Mr. Anson Warley. He's not coming."

Mrs. Jaspar's jaw fell, and she stared at the nurse's coldly smiling face. "Not coming?"

"No. He's not coming. He's not on the list." (That old list! As if Miss Cress didn't know it by heart! Everybody in the house did, except the booby, George, who heard it reeled off every other night by Munson, and who was always stumbling over the names, and having to refer to the written paper.)

"Not on the list?" Mrs. Jaspar gasped.

Miss Cress shook her pretty head.

Signs of uneasiness gathered on Mrs. Jaspar's face and her lip began to tremble. It always amused Miss Cress to give her these little jolts, though she knew Miss Dunn and the doctors didn't approve of her doing so. She knew also that it was against her own interests, and she did try to bear in mind Miss Dunn's oft-repeated admonition about not sending up the patient's blood pressure; but when she was in high spirits, as she was tonight (they would certainly be engaged), it was irresistible to get a rise out of the old lady. And she thought it funny, this new figure unexpectedly appearing among those time-worn guests. ("I wonder what the rest of 'em 'll say to him," she giggled inwardly.)

"No; he's not on the list." Mrs. Jaspar, after pondering deeply, announced the fact with an air of recovered composure.

"That's what I told you," snapped Miss Cress.

"He's not on the list; but he promised me to come. I saw him yesterday," continued Mrs. Jaspar, mysteriously.

"You *saw* him—where?"

She considered. "Last night, at the Fred Amesworths' dance."

"Ah," said Miss Cress, with a little shiver; for she knew that Mrs. Amesworth was dead, and she was the intimate friend of the trained nurse who was keep-

ing alive, by dint of *piqûres* and high frequency, the inarticulate and inanimate Mr. Amesworth. "It's funny," she remarked to Mrs. Jaspar, "that you'd never invited Mr. Warley before."

"No, I hadn't; not for a long time. I believe he felt I'd neglected him; for he came up to me last night, and said he was so sorry he hadn't been able to call. It seems he's been ill, poor fellow. Not as young as he was! So of course I invited him. He was very much gratified."

Mrs. Jaspar smiled at the remembrance of her little triumph; but Miss Cress's attention had wandered, as it always did when the patient became docile and reasonable. She thought: "Where's old Lavinia? I bet she can't find Munson." And she got up and crossed the floor to look into Mrs. Jaspar's bedroom, where the safe was.

There an astonishing sight met her. Munson, as she had expected, was nowhere visible; but Lavinia, on her knees before the safe, was in the act of opening it herself, her twitching hand slowly moving about the mysterious dial.

"Why, I thought you'd forgotten the combination!" Miss Cress exclaimed.

Lavinia turned a startled face over her shoulder. "So I had, Miss. But I've managed to remember it, thank God. I *had* to, you see, because Munson's forgot to come home."

"Oh," said the nurse incredulously. ("Old fox," she thought, "I wonder why she's always pretended she'd forgotten it.") For Miss Cress did not know that the age of miracles is not yet past.

Joyous, trembling, her cheeks wet with grateful tears, the little old woman was on her feet again, clutching to her breast the diamond stars, the necklace of *solitaires*, the tiara, the earrings. One by one she spread them out on the velvet-lined tray in which they always used to be carried from the safe to the dressing-room; then, with rambling fingers, she managed to lock the safe again, and put the keys in the drawer where they belonged, while Miss Cress continued to stare at her in amazement. "I don't believe the old witch is as shaky as she makes out," was her reflection as Lavinia passed her, bearing the jewels to the dressing-room where Mrs. Jaspar, lost in pleasant memories, was still computing: "The Italian Ambassador, the Bishop, the Torrington Blighs, the Mitchell Magraws, the Fred Amesworths. . ."

Mrs. Jaspar was allowed to go down to the drawing-room alone on dinner-party evenings because it would have mortified her too much to receive her guests with a maid or a nurse at her elbow; but Miss Cress and Lavinia always leaned over the stair-rail to watch her descent, and make sure it was accomplished in safety.

"She do look lovely yet, when all her diamonds is on," Lavinia sighed, her purblind eyes bedewed with memories, as the bedizened wig and purple velvet disappeared at the last bend of the stairs. Miss Cress, with a shrug, turned back to the fire and picked up her knitting, while Lavinia set about the slow ritual of tidying up her mistress's room. From below they heard the sound of George's stentorian monologue: "Mr. and Mrs. Torrington Bligh, Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Magraw . . . Mr. Ladew, Miss Laura Ladew. . ."

IV

Anson Warley, who had always prided himself on his equable temper, was conscious of being on edge that evening. But it was an irritability which did not frighten him (in spite of what those doctors always said about the importance of keeping calm) because he knew it was due merely to the unusual lucidity of his mind. He was in fact feeling uncommonly well, his brain clear and all his perceptions so alert that he could positively hear the thoughts passing through his man-servant's mind on the other side of the door, as Filmore grudgingly laid out the evening clothes.

Smiling at the man's obstinacy, he thought: "I shall have to tell them tonight that Filmore thinks I'm no longer fit to go into society." It was always pleasant to hear the incredulous laugh with which his

younger friends received any allusion to his supposed senility. "What, *you?* Well, that's a good one!" And he thought it was, himself.

And then, the moment he was in his bedroom, dressing, the sight of Filmore made him lose his temper again. "No; *not* those studs, confound it. The black onyx ones—haven't I told you a hundred times? Lost them, I suppose? Sent them to the wash again in a soiled shirt? That it?" He laughed nervously, and sitting down before his dressing-table began to brush back his hair with short angry strokes.

"Above all," he shouted out suddenly, "don't stand there staring at me as if you were watching to see exactly at what minute to telephone for the undertaker!"

"The under—? Oh, sir!" gasped Filmore.

"The—the—damn it, are you *deaf* too? Who said undertaker? I said *taxi;* can't you hear what I say?"

"You want me to call a taxi, sir?"

"No; I don't. I've already told you so. I'm going to walk." Warley straightened his tie, rose and held out his arms toward his dress-coat.

"It's bitter cold, sir; better let me call a taxi all the same."

Warley gave a short laugh. "Out with it, now! What you'd really like to suggest is that I should telephone to say I can't dine out. You'd scramble me some eggs instead, eh?"

"I wish you would stay in, sir. There's eggs in the house."

"My overcoat," snapped Warley.

"Or else let me call a taxi; now do, sir."

Warley slipped his arms into his overcoat, tapped his chest to see if his watch (the thin evening watch) and his note-case were in their proper pockets, turned back to put a dash of lavender on his handkerchief, and walked with stiff quick steps toward the front door of his flat.

Filmore, abashed, preceded him to ring for the lift; and then, as it quivered upward through the long shaft, said again: "It's a bitter cold night, sir; and you've had a good deal of exercise today."

Warley levelled a contemptuous glance at him. "Daresay that's why I'm feeling so fit," he retorted as he entered the lift.

It *was* bitter cold; the icy air hit him in the chest when he stepped out of the overheated building, and he halted on the doorstep and took a long breath. "Filmore's missed his vocation; ought to be nurse to a paralytic," he thought. "He'd love to have to wheel me about in a chair."

After the first shock of the biting air he began to find it exhilarating, and walked along at a good pace, dragging one leg ever so little after the other. (The *masseur* had promised him that he'd soon be rid of that stiffness.) Yes—decidedly a fellow like himself

ought to have a younger valet; a more cheerful one, anyhow. He felt like a young'un himself this evening; as he turned into Fifth Avenue he rather wished he could meet some one he knew, some man who'd say afterward at his club: "Warley? Why, I saw him sprinting up Fifth Avenue the other night like a two-year-old; that night it was four or five below. . ." He needed a good counter-irritant for Filmore's gloom. "Always have young people about you," he thought as he walked along; and at the words his mind turned to Elfrida Flight, next to whom he would soon be sitting in a warm pleasantly lit dining-room—*where?*

It came as abruptly as that: the gap in his memory. He pulled up at it as if his advance had been checked by a chasm in the pavement at his feet. Where the dickens was he going to dine? And with whom was he going to dine? God! But things didn't happen in that way; a sound strong man didn't suddenly have to stop in the middle of the street and ask himself where he was going to dine. . .

"Perfect in mind, body and understanding." The old legal phrase bobbed up inconsequently into his thoughts. Less than two minutes ago he had answered in every particular to that description; what was he now? He put his hand to his forehead, which was bursting; then he lifted his hat and let the cold air blow for a while on his overheated temples. It was

queer, how hot he'd got, walking. Fact was, he'd been sprinting along at a damned good pace. In future he must try to remember not to hurry. . . Hang it—one more thing to remember! . . Well, but what was all the fuss about? Of course, as people got older their memories were subject to these momentary lapses; he'd noticed it often enough among his contemporaries. And, brisk and alert though he still was, it wouldn't do to imagine himself totally exempt from human ills. . .

Where was it he was dining? Why, somewhere farther up Fifth Avenue; he was perfectly sure of that. With that lovely . . . that lovely. . . No; better not make any effort for the moment. Just keep calm, and stroll slowly along. When he came to the right street corner of course he'd spot it; and then everything would be perfectly clear again. He walked on, more deliberately, trying to empty his mind of all thoughts. "Above all," he said to himself, "don't worry."

He tried to beguile his nervousness by thinking of amusing things. "Decline the boredom—" He thought he might get off that joke tonight. "Mrs. Jaspar requests the pleasure—Mr. Warley declines the boredom." Not so bad, really; and he had an idea he'd never told it to the people . . . what in hell *was* their name? . . . the people he was on his way to dine with. . . *Mrs. Jaspar requests the pleasure.*

Poor old Mrs. Jaspar; again it occurred to him that he hadn't always been very civil to her in old times. When everybody's running after a fellow it's pardonable now and then to chuck a boring dinner at the last minute; but all the same, as one grew older one understood better how an unintentional slight of that sort might cause offense, cause even pain. And he hated to cause people pain. . . He thought perhaps he'd better call on Mrs. Jaspar some afternoon. She'd be surprised! Or ring her up, poor old girl, and propose himself, just informally, for dinner. One dull evening wouldn't kill him—and how pleased she'd be! Yes—he thought decidedly. . . When he got to be her age, he could imagine how much he'd like it if somebody still in the running should ring him up unexpectedly and say—

He stopped, and looked up, slowly, wonderingly, at the wide illuminated façade of the house he was approaching. Queer coincidence—it was the Jaspar house. And all lit up; for a dinner evidently. And that was queerer yet; almost uncanny; for here he was, in front of the door, as the clock struck a quarter past eight; and of course—he remembered it quite clearly now—it was just here, it was with Mrs. Jaspar, that he was dining. . . Those little lapses of memory never lasted more than a second or two. How right he'd been not to let himself worry. He pressed his hand on the door-bell.

"God," he thought, as the double doors swung open, "but it's good to get in out of the cold."

V

In that hushed sonorous house the sound of the door-bell was as loud to the two women upstairs as if it had been rung in the next room.

Miss Cress raised her head in surprise, and Lavinia dropped Mrs. Jaspar's other false set (the more comfortable one) with a clatter on the marble wash-stand. She stumbled across the dressing-room, and hastened out to the landing. With Munson absent, there was no knowing how George might muddle things. . .

Miss Cress joined her. "Who is it?" she whispered excitedly. Below, they heard the sound of a hat and a walking stick being laid down on the big marble-topped table in the hall, and then George's stentorian drone: "Mr. Anson Warley."

"It is—it *is!* I can see him—a gentleman in evening clothes," Miss Cress whispered, hanging over the stair-rail.

"Good gracious—mercy me! And Munson not here! Oh, whatever, whatever shall we do?" Lavinia was trembling so violently that she had to clutch the stair-rail to prevent herself from falling. Miss Cress thought, with her cold lucidity: "She's a good deal sicker than the old woman."

"What shall we do, Miss Cress? That fool of a George—he's showing him in! Who could have thought it?" Miss Cress knew the images that were whirling through Lavinia's brain: the vision of Mrs. Jaspar's having another stroke at the sight of this mysterious intruder, of Mr. Anson Warley's seeing her there, in her impotence and her abasement, of the family's being summoned, and rushing in to exclaim, to question, to be horrified and furious—and all because poor old Munson's memory was going, like his mistress's, like Lavinia's, and because he had forgotten that it was one of the *dinner nights*. Oh, misery! . . . The tears were running down Lavinia's cheeks, and Miss Cress knew she was thinking: "If the daughters send him off—and they will—where's he going to, old and deaf as he is, and all his people dead? Oh, if only he can hold on till she dies, and get his pension. . ."

Lavinia recovered herself with one of her supreme efforts. "Miss Cress, we must go down at once, at once! Something dreadful's going to happen. . ." She began to totter toward the little velvet-lined lift in the corner of the landing.

Miss Cress took pity on her. "Come along," she said. "But nothing dreadful's going to happen. You'll see."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Cress. But the shock—the

awful shock to her—of seeing that strange gentleman walk in."

"Not a bit of it." Miss Cress laughed as she stepped into the lift. "He's not a stranger. She's expecting him."

"Expecting him? Expecting Mr. Warley?"

"Sure she is. She told me so just now. She says she invited him yesterday."

"But, Miss Cress, what are you thinking of? Invite him—how? When you know she can't write nor telephone?"

"Well, she says she saw him; she saw him last night at a dance."

"Oh, God," murmured Lavinia, covering her eyes with her hands.

"At a dance at the Fred Amesworths'—that's what she said," Miss Cress pursued, feeling the same little shiver run down her back as when Mrs. Jaspar had made the statement to her.

"The Amesworths—oh, not the Amesworths?" Lavinia echoed, shivering too. She dropped her hands from her face, and followed Miss Cress out of the lift. Her expression had become less anguished, and the nurse wondered why. In reality, she was thinking, in a sort of dreary beatitude: "But if she's suddenly got as much worse as this, she'll go before me, after all, my poor lady, and I'll be able to see to it

that she's properly laid out and dressed, and nobody but Lavinia's hands'll touch her."

"You'll see—if she was expecting him, as she says, it won't give her a shock, anyhow. Only, how did *he* know?" Miss Cress whispered, with an acuter renewal of her shiver. She followed Lavinia with muffled steps down the passage to the pantry, and from there the two women stole into the dining-room, and placed themselves noiselessly at its farther end, behind the tall Coromandel screen through the cracks of which they could peep into the empty room.

The long table was set, as Mrs. Jaspar always insisted that it should be on these occasions; but old Munson not having returned, the gold plate (which his mistress also insisted on) had not been got out, and all down the table, as Lavinia saw with horror, George had laid the coarse blue and white plates from the servants' hall. The electric wall-lights were on, and the candles lit in the branching Sèvres candelabra —so much at least had been done. But the flowers in the great central dish of Rose Dubarry porcelain, and in the smaller dishes which accompanied it—the flowers, oh shame, had been forgotten! They were no longer real flowers; the family had long since suppressed that expense; and no wonder, for Mrs. Jaspar always insisted on orchids. But Grace, the youngest daughter, who was the kindest, had hit on the clever device of arranging three beautiful clusters of artifi-

cial orchids and maidenhair, which had only to be lifted from their shelf in the pantry and set in the dishes—only, of course, that imbecile footman had forgotten, or had not known where to find them. And, oh, horror, realizing his oversight too late, no doubt, to appeal to Lavinia, he had taken some old newspapers and bunched them up into something that he probably thought resembled a bouquet, and crammed one into each of the priceless Rose Dubarry dishes.

Lavinia clutched at Miss Cress's arm. "Oh, look—look what he's done; I shall die of the shame of it. . . Oh, Miss, hadn't we better slip around to the drawing-room and try to coax my poor lady upstairs again, afore she ever notices?"

Miss Cress, peering through the crack of the screen, could hardly suppress a giggle. For at that moment the double doors of the dining-room were thrown open, and George, shuffling about in a baggy livery inherited from a long-departed predecessor of more commanding build, bawled out in his loud sing-song: "Dinner is served, madam."

"Oh, it's too late," moaned Lavinia. Miss Cress signed to her to keep silent, and the two watchers glued their eyes to their respective cracks of the screen.

What they saw, far off down the vista of empty drawing-rooms, and after an interval during which (as Lavinia knew) the imaginary guests were sup-

posed to file in and take their seats, was the entrance, at the end of the ghostly cortège, of a very old woman, still tall and towering, on the arm of a man somewhat smaller than herself, with a fixed smile on a darkly pink face, and a slim erect figure clad in perfect evening clothes, who advanced with short measured steps, profiting (Miss Cress noticed) by the support of the arm he was supposed to sustain. "Well—I never!" was the nurse's inward comment.

The couple continued to advance, with rigid smiles and eyes staring straight ahead. Neither turned to the other, neither spoke. All their attention was concentrated on the immense, the almost unachievable effort of reaching that point, half way down the long dinner table, opposite the big Dubarry dish, where George was drawing back a gilt armchair for Mrs. Jaspar. At last they reached it, and Mrs. Jaspar seated herself, and waved a stony hand to Mr. Warley. "On my right." He gave a little bow, like the bend of a jointed doll, and with infinite precaution let himself down into his chair. Beads of perspiration were standing on his forehead, and Miss Cress saw him draw out his handkerchief and wipe them stealthily away. He then turned his head somewhat stiffly toward his hostess.

"Beautiful flowers," he said, with great precision and perfect gravity, waving his hand toward the bunched-up newspaper in the bowl of Sèvres.

Mrs. Jaspar received the tribute with complacency. "So glad . . . orchids . . . From High Lawn . . . every morning," she simpered.

"Mar-vellous," Mr. Warley completed.

"I always say to the Bishop. . ." Mrs. Jaspar continued.

"Ha—of course," Mr. Warley warmly assented.

"Not that I don't think. . ."

"Ha—rather!"

George had reappeared from the pantry with a blue crockery dish of mashed potatoes. This he handed in turn to one after another of the imaginary guests, and finally presented to Mrs. Jaspar and her right-hand neighbour.

They both helped themselves cautiously, and Mrs. Jaspar addressed an arch smile to Mr. Warley. "'Nother month—no more oysters."

"Ha—no more!"

George, with a bottle of Apollinaris wrapped in a napkin, was saying to each guest in turn: "Perrier-Jouet, 'ninety-five." (He had picked that up, thought Miss Cress, from hearing old Munson repeat it so often.)

"Hang it—well, then just a sip," murmured Mr. Warley.

"Old times," bantered Mrs. Jaspar; and the two turned to each other and bowed their heads and touched glasses.

"I often tell Mrs. Amesworth. . ." Mrs. Jaspar continued, bending to an imaginary presence across the table.

"Ha—*ha!*" Mr. Warley approved.

George reappeared and slowly encircled the table with a dish of spinach. After the spinach the Apollinaris also went the rounds again, announced successively as Château Lafite, 'seventy-four, and "the old Newbold Madeira". Each time that George approached his glass, Mr. Warley made a feint of lifting a defensive hand, and then smiled and yielded. "Might as well—hanged for a sheep. . ." he remarked gaily; and Mrs. Jaspar giggled.

Finally a dish of Malaga grapes and apples was handed. Mrs. Jaspar, now growing perceptibly languid, and nodding with more and more effort at Mr. Warley's pleasantries, transferred a bunch of grapes to her plate, but nibbled only two or three. "Tired," she said suddenly, in a whimper like a child's; and she rose, lifting herself up by the arms of her chair, and leaning over to catch the eye of an invisible lady, presumably Mrs. Amesworth, seated opposite to her. Mr. Warley was on his feet too, supporting himself by resting one hand on the table in a jaunty attitude. Mrs. Jaspar waved to him to be reseated. "Join us—after cigars," she smilingly ordained; and with a great and concentrated effort he bowed to her as she passed toward the double doors which George was throwing

open. Slowly, majestically, the purple velvet train disappeared down the long enfilade of illuminated rooms, and the last door closed behind her.

"Well, I do believe she's enjoyed it!" chuckled Miss Cress, taking Lavinia by the arm to help her back to the hall. Lavinia, for weeping, could not answer.

VI

Anson Warley found himself in the hall again, getting into his fur-lined overcoat. He remembered suddenly thinking that the rooms had been intensely over-heated, and that all the other guests had talked very loud and laughed inordinately. "Very good talk though, I must say," he had to acknowledge.

In the hall, as he got his arms into his coat (rather a job, too, after that Perrier-Jouet) he remembered saying to somebody (perhaps it was to the old butler): "Slipping off early—going on; 'nother engagement," and thinking to himself the while that when he got out into the fresh air again he would certainly remember where the other engagement was. He smiled a little while the servant, who seemed a clumsy fellow, fumbled with the fastening of the door. "And Filmore, who thought I wasn't even well enough to dine out! Damned ass! What would he say if he knew I was going on?"

The door opened, and with an immense sense of ex-

hilaration Mr. Warley issued forth from the house and drew in a first deep breath of night air. He heard the door closed and bolted behind him, and continued to stand motionless on the step, expanding his chest, and drinking in the icy draught.

" 'Spose it's about the last house where they give you 'ninety-five Perrier-Jouet," he thought; and then: "Never heard better talk either. . ."

He smiled again with satisfaction at the memory of the wine and the wit. Then he took a step forward, to where a moment before the pavement had been—and where now there was nothing.

DIEU D'AMOUR

A CASTLE IN CYPRUS

I

ONE crept up the giddy stairways cut in the cliff-side, and through the passages of vaulted stone, holding one's breath; for at that hour the place was evil.

In the darker angles of the tunnel-like ascent, cat-amawfreys hung snout downward, nuzzling the dusk. People said they could sing like birds. Father Gregory, the oldest monk in the famous monastery of Belle Païs, below the castle of Dieu d'Amour, said that when he came out to Cyprus from France, years before, there was still at Belle Païs an aged father who had heard them. Others, however, asserted that when Saint Hilarion the Abbot, flying before the throngs of pilgrims who besieged his solitude in the Egyptian desert, had taken refuge in a cavern of the inaccessible peak of Dieu d'Amour, he had exorcised the creatures, and they had vanished in hissing and foul smoke, never to reappear till the coming of the present queen—who knows?

Certainly they were there now, as all who mounted

at dusk to the king's castle had reason to know. You might cross yourself and invoke your guardian angel, and mutter litanies as hard as you liked; but even as you stole past the cavern of Saint Hilarion, where once there had been a chapel with tapers and relics, but now all was ruined and desecrate—even there, close to the arched entrance where countless pilgrims used to pray and kiss the threshold, Godfrey had seen the nuzzling creatures dangling and swinging. The castle of the Lusignan kings was not a wholesome place for the soul.

It was different at noonday. Then, from the sheer pinnacle on which it was poised like a bird, rich slopes fell away from the castle in a dappling of spring colours, wheat and wine and mulberry, rosy orchard and dark carob grove; and the wild peaks, as though driven by a ceaseless gale, blew eastward to Buffavento the impregnable, to Kantara, and the holy convent of Antiphonissa. Far below, on the blue sea, lay Kyrenia, the guardian fortress, compact in her walls, and the sea was a tossing of laughter all the way to the Caramanian coast, where the snows of the Taurus floated in absolute light. At that hour, as befitted its name, Dieu d'Amour, turreted, balconied, galleried to catch the sun, seemed made for delicate enchantments; and Godfrey, leaning on a trefoiled balcony over the abyss of light and sea, could joke with the squires and pages, and agree that the old stories must

be true, and that, centuries before Saint Hilarion's coming, Venus, Queen of Cyprus, had built that towering pleasure-house, and reigned there in mirth and revelry with her son Prince Cupid. An old wives' tale, said the learned; yet hard to dispute, when the monks of Belle Païs still showed you, as the chief ornament of their cloister, the tomb of Queen Venus, heavy with marble wreaths. "And as for Prince Cupid," they would add with a wink, "if we can't show you his tomb as well, it's because he's still alive, and running about at his wicked work too fast to be caught."

True enough, no doubt! but at Dieu d'Amour the mirth and the revelry were long over, and now the ruin and the doom were manifest.

Not that the castle was all a ruin. Though the chapel of Saint Hilarion was befouled, and the saint's bones scattered to the winds, the king of Cyprus still kept an obstinate and mournful state in the upper apartments of the palace, and his queen, in her chamber, counted her pearls, and sat in a window staring northward, dark and sumptuous among her slaves. Sometimes for days she did not speak; when she saw the king she merely burst out laughing. She thought only of her dresses and jewels—and of those for whom she adorned herself. Her tirewomen had to drag out new robes every day from chests painted with saints and knights, or inlaid with

crescents and traceries of mother-of-pearl. Now and then, if the veils from Sidon or the velvets from Damascus were not instantly forthcoming, a slave-girl was beaten with rods and hurried off swooning to a dungeon; but another maid, if she bought a new kind of song-bird from a wandering pedlar, or coaxed a Compostella cockle-shell off a pilgrim's hat, might have an emerald tossed at her by her mistress's contemptuous hand. There were always merchants hanging about below, at Kyrenia, to profit by the royal whims; and it was said that to have audience of her majesty they had to pay the shrewd governor of the castle a heavy toll. But on most days the queen sat staring northward, hour by hour, and said nothing, and saw nothing; and the king played at chess with his knights, or taught a little dog to dance. To this was the ruler reduced who had been the last aspirant to the Christian crown of Jerusalem, had conquered Alexandria for a day, and stood in the train of princes when the Roman Emperor was crowned at Rheims.

II

Near the top of the last stairway Godfrey plunged into a tunnel-like passage. At its end he groped for a low door of cedar-wood, and tapped on it three times. After a moment the bars shot back, and he caught a sweet waft of sandal and aloes, stooped his

tall shoulders to creep in, and felt the Circassian girl's hand dragging him through obscurity and out into a vaulted room.

The last sunlight filled the panes of the western oriel; it was as bright as a new day. The princess, lute in hand, stood pencilled against this resurrection light like a little dark saint on a gold ground. But in reality she was not dark: under her coif and veil her hair spiralled out like the gold wire of the old heathen ornaments which the labourers dug out of the vineyards in the valleys.

"Come," she said, throwing aside her lute; "I'm impatient."

The Circassian girl moved the inlaid lectern of ebony wood toward the window. On it rested a smooth page of vellum, torn from an ancient illuminated book, the illumination turned face down so that the blank side of the page was uppermost. On this, written out in comely script, was the Lusignan device: *Pour Léalté Maintenir,* and underneath had been scrawled a few imitative pot-hooks. The Princess Medea was learning to write.

Godfrey the page was her writing master. Born of a rude English knight and a shy little Norman mother, and early orphaned of both parents, the boy had been bred up by his mother's brother, Sub-Prior of Saint Germer-de-Fly in Normandy, and had there learnt to read and write, and in course of time would

probably have received the tonsure; but when he was twelve or thirteen a company of knights rode by on their way to the Holy Places, and one of them, the tallest and wittiest, took a fancy to Godfrey, and carried him off as his page. This noble adventurer, John of Yvetot, was now a liegeman of the Lusignans, and in command of the fortress of Kyrenia. People said he commanded the queen too. At any rate, he came and went as he pleased in Dieu d'Amour, and his page Godfrey with him. But no one knew that Godfrey was teaching the princess to write. Her royal parents would have been scandalized at her wishing to acquire so unprincely an art; or the queen might have been jealous and suspicious; one could never tell. She seldom visited her poor ailing son, and gave little thought to her daughter. The Princess Medea, it was whispered, might have done as she pleased in graver matters; but this clerkly business would have needed explaining. It savoured too much of necromancy. So she and her ladies kept the matter to themselves, and thus added the requisite touch of peril to a task which might otherwise have grown dull. For the princess was royal enough to show no clerkly aptitude. She could embroider like Queen Penelope if she chose—but write!

The bolts were slipped home again, and the Circassian girl curled herself up to sleep in a corner.

"No; that E is wrong again. Look —." Godfrey,

trembling a little, dipped his quill in the ink-horn, and wrote out a large fair E. Then he took the princess's hand (like holding a bird, it was so warm and beat so), and tried to make it form the same lines. The princess, wrinkling her forehead and biting her lip, bent over their linked fingers—but suddenly the pen fell on the page with a splutter.

"Oh—" cried the scribe, reproachfully.

"I don't want to write," she said.

Godfrey, reddening, drew back. Had he offended her? "What does it please your Highness to want?"

She moved out to the balcony, and beckoned. "Look."

Far to the west, across leagues of sea and mountain, the sun was plunging down to a fiery burial behind the summit of Andramako. As it descended, the upper spaces of the sky turned green, and the green melted into feathery rippled flames. Below where the two were leaning the cedar-spurred crags dropped to the twilight of the plain, and the edge of the plain drew its dark tracery for miles along a golden sea. Farther still, above the Asian shore, the snows of Taurus floated in lilac twilight. Under the balcony, in the windows of Belle Païs, just visible through its colonnade of cypresses, the candles were lighting for vespers. All else in the depths was dark. The bells of a flock of sheep tinkled homeward. Girl and boy leaned and listened.

"How have I displeased your Highness?"

"Everything displeases me." It was her mother's tone. Sometimes she had that mocking note which made Godfrey's heart contract; then again her voice was as fresh as the sheep-bells. "Do you really believe that Queen Venus built this palace, Godfrey?"

"All the chronicles say so."

"She was a princess of our house, I suppose?"

Godfrey flushed. "I can't say exactly. I think she came from Babylon."

"Across the sea there?"

"Yes."

"Farther even than Antioch?"

"Much farther."

"And she was driven away with all her train by that sulky old anchorite Hilarion?"

"Who was a great saint, your Highness knows."

She smiled a little. "She is avenged, though; for now his chapel is become a haunt of bats and vipers."

"More's the pity, your Highness—"

"Ah but he offended a goddess! That's not safe. She *was* a goddess, Godfrey? They say she had her altars here."

"They say she was goddess of Love. But those are sorcerers' tales, and forbidden, as your Highness knows."

"Forbidden *here?*" The princess laughed.

"I wish your Highness would not laugh—like that."

"How shall I laugh, then?" She laid her hands on his shoulders and swung him round to her. "So?"

Her little face was close to his, lit by the sunset, like a delicate ivory touched with gilding. "So?" Her mouth was round and serious. It emitted the faintest tremor of a laugh. He looked into her eyes, deep as wells, and a thirst rose in him to drink of them. He was hot and beating all over after his breathless climb. He stooped and kissed the hem of her veil.

"They are marrying me to my uncle, the Prince of Antioch," she continued in the same cool taunting voice. "Next month at Famagusta. We shall keep great state in Antioch."

"Oh, no—no—no! Your Highness mocks me! It will not be." The boy threw himself sobbing at her feet.

"Horrible, isn't it?" The little princess laughed. "You know the way he grunts and storms, and breaks out all over in sweat. But what can you or I do to prevent it, my poor Godfrey? And I shall have lovers—as many as I choose. You shall be the first of them, if you like. *Do* you like, Godfrey—Godfrey? Look at the big star over there . . . as big as a moon. What is it?"

"They call it Venus."

She laughed again, still more softly, and he laughed

with her. She wound their two heads together in her veil of Tyrian gauze.

"Queen Venus . . . who was my great-great-grandmother. She shall be our star, then, Godfrey? Hush! What was that dark thing that just flew across her?"

From the cedars under the balcony a harsh whirr of bat-like wings had cut the air. Something flashed close to them, and Godfrey caught a single note, thrilling and sweet as a boy's treble.

"I thought I heard a bird," said the princess.

"It was the nightingales at Belle Païs," he stammered.

III

Famagusta lay under a pitiless sun. Like an old Egyptian crocodile basking in the heat, the city stretched her length of amber-coloured walls and towers along the flat blue sea.

John of Yvetot was feasting with the archbishop in his lordship's golden-brown palace, facing the mighty spires and buttresses of his cathedral church of Saint Nicholas. Archbishop and knight were in their lordly cups, with many other knights and prelates, and the Moorish girls were dancing in clear veils, and plum-coloured slaves fanning the Archbishop's concubine with fans shaped like the sacred *flabellum*, and flies battening on the welter of meat-pasties, dismembered fowls, molten jellies and dis-

embowelled pomegranates that covered the tables. Godfrey, dizzy and sick, slipped out into the square. . .

John of Yvetot had ridden across the island of Cyprus to Famagusta with young Godfrey in his train. The knight had been hastily despatched to prepare for the princess's wedding to her uncle of Antioch. The matter was still a secret, for the dispensation from Rome had not yet arrived; but it was a secret that any one in the bazaars could have told you, and the town was all a-feast for their coming.

Godfrey had ridden all those hot weary miles from Dieu d'Amour, through forest, marsh and plain, with burning head and hands of ice. A weight lay in the room of his boy's heart. The princess had suddenly said, as he was leaving her: "Love is best, and I will escape with you. Carry me to Normandy. I want to get away from all this blasphemy and vileness. My jewels will be enough to pay our way there. And even if we have to live in a woodman's hut and herd swine, it will be better than this—it will be the best thing in the world, as long as you and I are together."

When she spoke like that he could have lifted the world on his shoulders for her. Sometimes he feared, in that great cruel palace, to see her drawn to her mother's way of life; when she jested, as she had of her betrothal to the Prince of Antioch, he shuddered

and trembled for her. But the next moment he understood that her mockery was the mockery of despair, and that a new soul in her, helpless and inarticulate as a newborn infant, was stirring and crying to him for help. And his passion became clarified and illumined, and he touched her little hand with awe.

But he was only a poor page, and how could he hope to succeed in so desperate an enterprise as she had charged him with? To carry off a daughter of the house of Lusignan, in the teeth of governors, chamberlains, eunuchs, sentinels and slaves, seemed something that only a prince in a fairy-tale could achieve. Luckily a man was not a Norman for nothing; and audacity and astuteness were evenly mixed in Godfrey's blood. He pondered long; and it seemed to him that his only chance lay in secretly hiring a fishing-boat at Famagusta, sending it around the coast to Kyrenia, and one night getting the princess down from Dieu d'Amour (it must be a night when the governor of Kyrenia was up at the castle revelling), and so to sea with his treasure—at God's mercy. He was sure it must be right to get his princess away from all that lust and cruelty . . . and most of all from the dark pomp of Antioch, at the side of the savage old man whom she hated. It was horrible to think that Rome gave such dispensations. . . Of course he would save her, his little saint. . .

Even to Godfrey's heavy heart Famagusta, under that golden sun, was not a spectacle to be neglected. No man could count the proud city's soaring church-towers and sculptured convent-fronts—so like the great abbeys of his own Normandy, only russet-gold, almost sun-coloured, instead of gray, and with palms shooting up between their fretted towers and buttresses. Passing across the square in front of the archbishop's palace were trains of camels bearing the riches of Asia and Byzantium from the high-prowed blue and green ships in the harbour. Piles of rugs and veils and damascened armour were heaped under the arches of the bazaars, and thronging the streets were Greek sailors, Moslem merchants, naked blackamoors, ladies falcon on wrist, riding Norman palfreys, chained captives being sold by paunchy Jews, sorcerers swallowing snakes and knives, young boys of the desert with pomegranate flowers behind their ears dancing in strait tunics to a wail of savage music, painted courtesans leaning from pink terraces, scarred galley-slaves drinking in the taverns, story-tellers squatting on their carpets inside a ring of squatting Moslems; while from the innumerable church-towers a great swallow-flight of chimes wove a net of prayer above all the noise and lust and traffic.

Godfrey stood and stared; and as he stared the throng parted, and he saw another stream of people,

ragged pilgrims, vagabonds and cripples, pressing by him after some new sight. Boy-like, he was seized with a desire to know what they were after, and elbowed a way through the crowd to where they were gathering, at the end of the square, about the pedestal of a fallen statue. To the top of the pedestal had mounted a small haggard figure in goatskin and tattered cloak, with eyes gleaming through wisps of unkempt straw-coloured hair. Was it boy or woman, Godfrey wondered—or some ageless apparition of the desert? Under the hood there looked out a small pinched face, so tanned by desert suns, so wasted with weeping and fasting, that gazing at it he forgot to speculate on age or sex. Then a woman's voice spoke; low and clear it thrilled across the marketplace to the edge of the tatterdemalion following.

"Here, among your houses of prayer, I denounce you! Here, half way between the palaces of your archbishop and your king—" the woman's lean arm pointed in turn to each of the stately buildings—"I stand and declare to you your doom! They say there never was a city with so many churches as yours —I say there never was a city with so many sins. If you covered every inch of your island with churches there would not be enough to equal the number of your iniquities.

"Men tell me those churches were built in expiation of old evils—I say they were built to buy licence

for new crimes. And what do I see when I look within them? What do I see issuing forth from them even now?"

The speaker paused, her arm of denunciation again outstretched. From the archway of the archbishop's palace a white mule harnessed with gold was being led out by feathered blackamoors. A lady sat on it in careless state. She dropped her painted lids on the throng, and signed that a green velvet umbrella should be raised above her head. The crowd knew her and parted as she rode on.

"What do I see? The Host being carried from the house of your venerable Father in God to be laid on the lips of the dying? No—but Sin herself riding forth from his door like the sun in his splendour; and if I lifted the roof of the king's palace yonder, I should show you Sin lying on golden cushions, and Sin drinking from golden goblets, and Sin mocking and blaspheming against all things holy and of good report. And what else should I see in your convents and your monasteries, that are built over every inch of ground your churches have left free? Should I see prayer and abstinence and mercy buying back with tears and flagellations all these unspeakable horrors and impunities?"

At the question someone laughed in the crowd, and the laugh spread. The scandal of the monasteries was so flagrant that it was safe to laugh at it.

At Belle Païs all the novices were the sons of the old monks. At our Lady of Tyre. . .

The woman's voice went on, louder and shriller. Sins that Godfrey hardly knew the name of were flung like offal to the crowd. Atheists, necromancers, harlots and heretics were denounced. Ah, heretics—! What was that vainglorious monument almost touching their own holy Cathedral? No other than Saint George of the Greeks, impious temple of the schismatics! And there it stood, and its vault rang with their blasphemies, and its bell, calling men to hell-fire, was suffered to mingle with the bells of Christian churches, calling them to life eternal.

"Ah, Sodom, ah, Gomorrah, ah, great and blasphemous city, more abounding than any other in jewels and slaves and silks, in aloe-wood and labdanum and gold, beware lest the sun that beats down upon you today turn to fire tomorrow, and utterly consume you, leaving only a ruin that owls and satyrs shall inhabit, till the sea washes even that away, and men sailing by ask what is the name of that desert. Tomorrow, not later, shall this be. . ."

A few people had laughed when the speaker's skeleton arm was stretched out accusingly toward the dumb Lusignan palace. Everyone knew that the king of Cyprus never came to Famagusta. It was whispered that he was too much afraid of his barons,

and of his unruly Greek and Moslem subjects. It had needed all the queen's violence to obtain from him that their daughter's nuptials should be celebrated there with proper state, and in all men's sight, as became a princely bridal. . . But whatever else the strange pilgrim-woman had said was true. Everybody knew about the monasteries, and about the excesses of the archbishop's private life, his open tolerance of the schismatics, and even, people said, of the Moslems. The monks of Antiphonissa had been authorized by decree to take wives, like the schismatic priests. Saint Paul, the authorities affirmed, had advised the measure in hot climates. It was said to be written in the Book.

Well, Famagusta was hot enough, God knew. Ah, that blistering decomposing heat! How it weakened the will, corroded the soul, turned a man's marrow to tepid water! It was beating down so mercilessly on Godfrey's temples that while the pilgrim was still speaking he left the square and sought the shelter of the arcades. There he crept through the crowd that laughed and drank and wantoned, till he reached, on the edge of the town, a fortified brown church in a ring of palms. It was the church of Saint George of the Latins, the place of worship nearest the citadel, and so exposed to attack from the sea that when mass was said there archers always mounted guard on the *chemin-de-ronde* behind the high parapet. Today

no service was going on, and the stone roof was unguarded by its bowmen.

Godfrey pushed back the door, and the coolness of the interior flowed over his burning flesh. Through a lingering mist of incense he saw lights twinkling about the Host. On the marble floor a few dim figures were scattered in attitudes of prayer. Godfrey knelt at the foot of a pillar and pressed his burning head against the stone and prayed. . . A long time he knelt, like a drowned man with the sea washing over him, as one day, the preaching woman said, it would wash over all that was left of Famagusta. . .

At last he got to his feet again, and as he looked up his eyes lit on the capital of the column against which he had been kneeling. His sight was but half used to the dim light under the vaulting, but he recognized, about the abacus of the capital, a coil of evil-faced catamawfreys nuzzling downward as if to mock at him. Yes—there they hung, wrought in the stone of that holy place by some derisive chisel. . . His heart tightened at the presage; but as he drew back he felt a quiet touch, and there in front of him stood the goat-skinned woman of the square. In the half-light of the church he saw her face more clearly than in the blaze outside. It was a small parched face, still young, with high cheek-bones, and wisps of hair like sunburnt grass hanging over eyes as

clear as pale gray crystals. He had never seen eyes so clear.

"Sir page, I saw you listening to me just now in the market-place." She spoke with a strange commanding air, as if used to the speech of courts; but her language was a queer northern Latin which Godfrey would not have understood but for his monastic schooling at Saint Germer. He nodded: "Yes."

"Why did the people laugh when I denounced the sins in the king's palace?"

Godfrey, though those narrow eyes of hers burned him like icicles, could not help smiling at the question. "Because the palace is empty. The king never comes there any more."

"Where then does he live?"

"A three days' journey from here. High up in the mountains, in the castle of Dieu d'Amour." He spoke with the young courtier's superiority of knowledge. The idea of people not knowing where the king of Cyprus lived!

"Dieu d'Amour! Where is that?" Her voice was imperious, but Godfrey made no answer. There had been questioning enough, he began to think.

She repeated the name slowly, two or three times, with her halting guttural pronunciation. Then she said: "Thank you, sir page. God keep you," and moved away. But after a step she turned back. "Is there any one you wish me to pray for?" she asked.

Under the spell of those crystal eyes Godfrey's arrogance fell. "The Princess Medea," he whispered back, so low that he doubted if she heard the name.

"The Princess Medea," she repeated.

Godfrey lifted the wooden cross hanging from her rosary, and kissed it. A sense of compunction loosened his heart. The pilgrim woman continued to look at him. "If any may be saved from the doom, it shall be my cousin the Princess Medea," she said in the same soft voice.

"Your cousin—?" the boy exclaimed, indignant, yet half awed—such a note of command was in her sweetness. She smiled in silence. "But you—who are you then?" he stammered.

"A cousin of the kings of the earth, the lowest handmaid of the King of Heaven." The answer, no louder than a whisper, rang in his ears with the sound of trumpets. Godfrey continued to gaze, half pitying her for a poor madwoman, half dominated by the power that breathed from her. "Your name—?"

But the tattered figures of her following were closing in about her and crowding Godfrey aside. He caught by the sleeve a long lean man with the haunted eyes of the desert. "This pilgrim woman you are with—who is she?"

The man's eyes looked through and beyond him. "Of the race of some northern king, they say; but

to the Christian what are such glories but perdition?" Suddenly his gaze seemed to return to Godfrey. "Sir page, will you leave all and come with us?" he asked.

Godfrey shook his head, and the man pulled himself away and hurried toward the door of the church. The woman was passing out with her followers, a little band of unheeded footsore pilgrims. Famagusta had heard herself denounced too often to think of any of them again.

Godfrey felt new strength in his veins. Was it the hush and coolness of the church, or some virtue which had gone out of the woman's touch? He was glad he had whispered that name to her. Whoever she was, whatever she had meant by her strange words, he felt there was holiness in her, and that with the help of her prayers he would be given courage and cunning for his task.

IV

The steep windings of the cliff stairway seemed to lift him on wings. Never had the climb to the sunset seemed so short. More than a month had passed since he had ridden away from Dieu d'Amour with his lord. Affairs were treated deliberately in these subtle half-Oriental lands, and it was hinted, moreover, that the negotiations were prolonged because John of Yvetot found the change agreeable from

sleepy Kyrenia to the great sea-port, and certain eyes there brighter and younger than the queen's.

But here the two of them were back at last, the knight and his page, and the long delay, if little to the queen's liking, had served Godfrey's purpose unexpectedly. In a month, if one had two or three of the royal jewels in one's scrip, and a shrewd Norman head on one's shoulders, there were many things that even a young lad could accomplish, and certain people one could come to an understanding with. Godfrey felt he had reason to be proud of his cleverness, and rode back to Dieu d'Amour with so light a heart that he hardly felt the heat and fatigue of the way.

Even when he came to that dark tortuous vaulting of the stairs where nocturnal creatures swung from the groins, it hardly required an effort of the will to pass under the nuzzling mass that he imagined. . . Only, it was queer . . . what a foul smell! Like sulphur fumes . . . the devil's own smell . . . and a phosphorescent glimmer. . . He pushed on, a little sickened, and his foot slipped on something soft, like the body of a dead animal, leathery yet boneless. He kicked it aside, and hurried upward. As he mounted, another light, faint but pure, shone down on him; and reaching the angle of the Abbot Hilarion's chapel, he stopped amazed. It was from there that the light had shone. The ruined altar had been set up and hung with a white cloth. Tapers burned on

each side of a high gold crucifix, and a carpet of rich dyes, strewn with twigs of thyme and rosemary, covered the earthen floor. The chapel was empty; but the boy had the feeling—he could not have said why—that someone had left it but a moment before; some one whose devotions he had perhaps disturbed, and who might have slipped out of sight into the crypt-like shadows behind the altar, where Saint Hilarion was said to have made his bed on a stone. Godfrey crossed himself and knelt, wrapped in an atmosphere of prayer. Words of devotion rose, forming themselves unbidden on his lips. His soul seemed lifted on another's rapture, as the body floats on a summer sea.

He rose and hastened upward, his heart on fire, his mind too full of celestial light for words and reasoning. At his knock, the door of cedar-wood opened as usual, and there was the great traceried window, black against the evening gold. But the princess was not to be seen. Startled, Godfrey looked about him at the empty room. The Circassian girl met his glance with a smile, and finger on lip, tiptoed across the silken carpets to draw back a curtain. The princess's oratory. . .

A niche sheathed with gold and heavy with burning spices. The princess knelt beneath a Christ of ivory in a strait Byzantine skirt. The low recess seemed full of the same mysterious power of prayer

as the chapel on the way up. Godfrey, crossing himself, drew back abashed. The princess, seemingly unaware of his presence, remained absorbed in her devotions; but when she rose and turned to him, there was her own dear face. He knelt and touched the edge of her dress.

"You have been long away," she said.

"Yes; but now everything is ready."

Her face looked smaller than ever, white as a Host, and as if drawn inward, and distant. It was the heat, he supposed; even on this height the summer days were often intolerably heavy.

"You never doubted me?" he asked, touched in his pride.

She shook her head, and her eyes travelled back to his face—from where? He could not tell; but assuredly from some far country he had never seen.

She put out her hand and led him to the balcony. There hung the golden sun, the twilight stretched its wings across the valley, and lights were coming out in the windows of the abbey church of Belle Païs.

"Now tell me," she said.

He told her, and she listened in silence to what he said.

She seldom spoke much, and sometimes, when she did, and it was in her mother's tone, Godfrey would have given the world to have her silent. But tonight

her silence oppressed him, perhaps because he felt that it oppressed her too, that she was vainly struggling to break it. She listened to him attentively; he could see that by the expression of her little profile, so sharply drawn against the dimness; and now and then a pressure of her fingers on his arm signified (he supposed) approval or assent. That was all.

At last he said, with a touch of impatience: "Do you still reproach me for being gone so long?"

"No; it was necessary," she answered, very low.

"And your Highness is satisfied that all I have done is well done?"

"Yes."

He hesitated, his heart in his throat. "And you are still . . . still of the same mind?"

She turned to him quickly. "About what was agreed between us? More than ever, a thousand times more!"

His blood tingled with hope. "Then, Princess—then—my reward?"

Again those distant eyes travelled back to him, not estranged, but only, as it seemed, bewildered, seeking. "Reward?"

What a clumsy boor she must think him! But never mind—he was not the wooer to lose heart. "Do you remember, that other night . . . the night you promised . . . the night you wound my head with yours in your veil?"

Gravely, as if half-perplexed, she lifted her hands to her coif. "The night is so hot that I have no veil." But suddenly she tossed off the coif, swiftly unplaited her long braids, and shaking out the veil of her hair wound it so close about his head that their cheeks were one. "Is that what you want? And this?" She turned her face and it melted into his, lid on lid, lip on lip. So they clung.

"And now goodbye, Godfrey," she whispered.

"Till tomorrow night?" he whispered back.

"Tomorrow night." Already she was out of his arms, and half the room was between them. The distance seemed like that between earth and a star. The Circassian was unbolting the outer door.

"An hour after midnight?" he insisted from the threshold.

The princess smiled, finger on lip, and watched him as he bent under the lintel. He heard the bolts shoot back into their sockets, and began to stumble down the long stairs to the foot of the peak.

"I have her safe!" he thought.

In the glory of the moment he had forgotten all else; but as he reached the turn of the stairs above the abbot's cavern, his heart dilated with another joy. He had the obscure feeling that Dieu d'Amour had been cleansed of old evils as Saint Hilarion's deserted shrine had been purified of filth and unclean spirits; and he paused with bowed head before the

threshold of the chapel. The altar-lights were out; but an oil-taper still burned before an image of the saint cased in silver and gold, in the antiquated Greek fashion. The place, dusky now, and empty, was still sweet with the perfume of strewn herbs, and also, it seemed, with a subtler sweetness, as of the lingering essence of prayer. Godfrey knelt again, giving his all to his God and his princess.

When he began to descend the stairs below the chapel he felt a recoil at the idea of stumbling once more on that leathery boneless body, and smelling the sulphur after the sweetness; but all the way was clean, and the darkness perfumed, as if holy feet had fallen there just before him, and the powers of evil had gone up like smoke. He had the feeling which sometimes comes to a watcher when, looking out on a midnight sky, he sees with his inner sight the beating of the wings of dawn.

V

It was not till he reached the foot of the cliff-stairs, and had scrambled through a breach in the wall of which he and one or two others knew the secret, that he remembered he had not questioned the Princess Medea about the changed appearance of the chapel.

Those lights, those altar ornaments, had been a

sight so inexplicable and startling that he had felt the awe of it till he reached her presence; but from the moment of seeing her again she had filled his world. It was always so. When he was in her presence nothing seemed memorable or remarkable except the fact that she existed. But now he was sorry he had not spoken to her of what he had seen, for something in her face as she rose from praying seemed to say that she too had been touched by the same mystery.

What could have happened to Dieu d'Amour, castle of lust and terror and misery, thus to purify and transform it? What had led the steps of the saints back to its unhallowed threshold? What pious hands had lifted the abbot's altar, swept and garnished the floor, relit the taper? As Godfrey gazed up at that aerial miracle of rock and masonry, fierce yet tottering against the sunset, he asked himself if what he had seen really existed, or might not rather have been a vision, the emanation of his princess's hidden longings? She had always sickened at what went on in that half-ruined half-bedizened stronghold, though she had been born to that way of life, and knew no other, save what he, a mere page, and no older than herself, had given her hints of from his readings in the histories of the saints. To these she listened with fervour; and though at times he felt other moods in her, they would always vanish when she saw his dis-

tress. . . Yes; he wished he had remembered to question her about the chapel. . .

Night had fallen when he turned down the path to Kyrenia. Higher and more majestic at every turn the Lusignan palace soared above him, lights kindling here and there through its dark trefoils and moving behind the slits in its mysterious walls. Still descending, he skirted the cypress rampart of Belle Païs, where Queen Venus lay; and there too he saw lights, and heard monks chanting. As he passed into the cypress shadow he saw a beggar-woman on a stone. Her hood hung forward over her bent head, and her hands were clasped on her staff. The shade where she sat was so deep that he started back, and just avoided stumbling over her; but she neither withdrew her staff, nor looked up, and he went on, thinking her asleep.

When he reached the castle of Kyrenia, all was dark and quiet. His lordship the governor had ridden with his train to inspect the fortress of Buffavento, and was to sup on his way home with the abbess of Antiphonissa. Godfrey crept past the sentinel, who was his friend, and stole up the stairs to the room where he slept with the other pages. They had all ridden out with their lord, and the room was empty, and open to the stars. Godfrey sat late in the window and watched the glitter of the south-

ern night undulating on the sea below. Now and then a sail darkened the stars as it sped by under the castle walls; and while he watched it, he thought of a fishing-vessel lying snug in the little port, a lantern swinging from her stern, which the next night, all sails spread, would be beating northward to Tyre or Caesarea. He forgot the illuminated chapel, and all his visions, and felt only his princess's lips, when she had wound their two heads in her hair.

VI

The night following there was a supper in the queen's apartments, and John of Yvetot and all his train rode up to Dieu d'Amour. Rumour said that the queen thought the governor of Kyrenia supped too often with the abbess of Antiphonissa; and to dispel her anger he had ordered a band of Syrian dancers to come from Famagusta and dance before her.

Godfrey rode with the others, and sat with the queen's pages at the end of the vaulted banqueting hall, while the queen and the governor, and their knights and ladies, feasted at the high table under the dais; and when the feast was over, and songs and laughter rang high, the curtains of Damascus silk were drawn open, and slim painted dancers glided into the space between the tables.

Godfrey's head was as light as if he had emptied the big golden bowl of Cyprian wine which the slaves carried about the table; but he had hardly touched his lips to it. He was dizzy with the sense of impending adventure, yet the Norman side of his head was as clear and true as a newly-cast bell. He was watching with every nerve and vein of his prompt alert body, every cell of his lucid brain, watching the moment to slip out unperceived, to reach the bottom of that endless cliff-staircase, and spring on the horse which was to carry him down the mountain to Kyrenia.

So closely had he timed his flight, so sure was he of himself and of his preparations, that one half of him could sit and laugh, and follow the weaving of olive-armed dancers, while the other half, body and brain, was already down the hill, in the dark little port, and on the deck of a fishing-vessel from Famagusta whose sails were even now being shaken out.

John of Yvetot and his knights had drunk deep, as usual; and the queen, leaning forward, laughing, languishing, had one arm about the governor's neck, while the other drew to her the youngest and slimmest of the Syrians. There was a confusion of laughter and clapping; every eye was turned to the splendid shameless woman under the purple curtains of the dais. Godfrey slipped from his seat, felt for his dagger, flung his cloak over him, and was out of the

hall and down the winding passage to the cliff-stairs before the pages nearest him could have noted his absence. And who was he, after all, that any of the revellers should give him a thought? He leapt down the stairs, came to the vaulted tunnel that he hated, found it all fair and free from evil things, noticed the taper floating in oil in the quiet shadowy chapel, and crossed himself and bent his knee on the threshold; then he hurried on and on, down and down, till he came to the courtyard at the foot of the cliff, where the knights' horses were tethered to rings in the wall. As he had foreseen, the place was unlit and deserted. Every groom and ostler was up in the royal kitchens, laughing and drinking with the castle wenches. The very sentinel had vanished from the walls. So things went on festal evenings at Dieu d'Amour. . . Godfrey's heart leapt up at the thought that so soon his princess would be gone from there forever. Already, he knew, she was below at Kyrenia, hidden with the Circassian girl in a safe house above the port, where she could almost have dropped out of the window to the deck of the fishing-boat from Famagusta.

The night was black, with a curtain of sultry cloud. Godfrey found his horse, untethered him, and in a trice was picking his way under the castle walls and past Belle Païs, till he came to the open slopes below, and then stretched away in a gallop to

Kyrenia. As he entered the gates the bell of a church rang eleven strokes. He had an hour before him.

He left his horse in the castle yard and hurried up to his room to fetch his purse, his papers and his little bundle of clothes, all stowed in safe hiding beneath his bed. As he passed out of the room he paused in the embrasure of the window. He could not see the port, though it was so close below him, but he pictured the stealthy preparations going forward on the deck of the vessel. . . Presently she would be gliding out, catching the night breeze off the mountains, and speeding over the dark waves like that vessel he barely guessed at as he watched her sails cross the open space framed by the window. He lingered and watched the vessel, wondering what she carried, and whither she was bent; just so, in an hour, would he and his love be speeding.

On a night so cloudy, it was pitch dark in the streets of Kyrenia, and Godfrey had given orders that no light should show through the windows of the house above the port. He groped his way along the lane, fumbled for the worn door-step, and knocked very softly on the panel of the door, asking himself —in one of those sudden irrational terrors which come to the coolest—if, in the darkness, he were not knocking at the wrong door, and rousing a strange household, while close by, behind another of these fea-

tureless Eastern house-fronts, his princess waited. . .

The door opened a few inches, and to his word, "Léalté," the voice of the woman of the house replied: "Maintenir." He drew a breath of relief, stole in, and heard the door barred behind him. The woman, shading a candle, beckoned him to follow her to a room with shuttered windows. The room was empty. He questioned: "The lady—?"

The woman shook her head, but made signs that seemed reassuring. The lady had come—oh, yes, had come. . .

"Where is she? And her damsel? Is there no one—?"

In the same whisper the woman, evidently frightened and confused by his bewilderment, told him the two had been there and gone again, perhaps a half-hour earlier—she thought at least half an hour.

Visions of conspiracy and betrayal flashed through the boy's mind. Dieu d'Amour was always thick with spying and delation; there was a watcher behind every arras. Fool that he had been, ever to imagine. . . Oh God, oh God, what had he done to have betrayed his princess to disaster? He caught the woman by the shoulders, shaking her as if to rattle her secret out of her. "Gone—gone where? Are you mad—or only lying? Give me her letter! Repeat her message! If you say she left none—." He was clutching wildly at his dagger.

The woman raised imploring arms. "To the ship; to the ship; that was her message. . ."

Godfrey's anger broke in a rush of humility and gratitude. To the ship—she had gone to the ship! No doubt she had had her reasons. Perhaps the Circassian girl had picked up rumours, had hinted that they would be safer in the vessel's hold than in the house. She would certainly have had her reasons. "To the ship?" he repeated. The woman, choking with fear, signed yes, and yes, to the ship . . . she had watched the two slip down to the port . . . on the blessed Virgin and all the saints she had. . .

Godfrey loosed his purse. Norman-like he counted, by the shaking light of the candle she held out, the exact sum he had promised; then he stormed out of the house, down the slippery black lane to the port.

The port was deserted. The silent fishing-boats huddled flank to flank in the narrow space looked like sleeping birds a-roost. The water clapped their sides with sharp little ripples; outside a fresh wind had risen. But the boats lay dumb and dark, as if unaware of it; not a sign of life on any of them. Godfrey, bewildered, dizzy with anxiety, groped from one stern to the other, stumbling over coiled ropes, sea-weedy chains, slimy offal, and all the dirt and welter of an Eastern harbour-side. The darkness

confused him. He thought he knew where his vessel lay, the vessel whose sails should be already spread; but he was blinded by the night and by his own excitement. He feared to call aloud, to attract attention, to risk boarding the wrong boat. With a sinking heart he stood and waited—waited for some signal which should come to him from his own vessel; though a deep dread already told him that her berth was empty.

At length he turned and looked back at the threatening mass of the overhanging fortress, and at the black house-fronts, lightless, indistinguishable, along the quay. . .

Everything that might have happened to baffle and upset his plan rushed on him with the fatal certainty of evil. Why, there was no ill thing that might not have befallen the fugitives! Even between house and port the princess might have been waylaid, carried back to Dieu d'Amour, or locked up behind those secret walls above him. He stared at the fortress in an agony of dread and conjecture. It seemed as if he must force his eyes to penetrate those thick walls and tear their secret from them, as he had tried to shake it from the woman. But he turned back disheartened, and looked again at the berth where his vessel had lain, and saw that past question its place was empty. Would the sailing-master, despite his orders and injunctions, have sailed without

the princess? It seemed incredible—if anything that was dark and unsurmised had been incredible in those secret Eastern places. But what if the vessel had sailed with the princess, if she had deserted her faithful page? Godfrey, in fresh agony, turned again to interrogate the row of houses along the quay. A feeble light twinkled in the window of one of them; a sailors' tavern, he remembered, of the humblest sort; he would go in, and see if anyone was stirring who could give him news. Even there, he well knew, a trap might lurk; but he was desperate now, and it was easier to face new risks than to stand there, listening, straining into the night, like a man whose eyes are bandaged and his ears stopped.

He was moving toward the tavern when he felt a quick twitch at his cloak. He started back and in the darkness just guessed a man's figure before him, cloaked, too, but bare-headed—beggar or pilgrim, it seemed. Godfrey held his breath, waiting, alert for a word or a sign. The man did not speak, but only pushed some small object into Godfrey's hand, and slipped away into the night. Godfrey called after him in a wild whisper and made a dash in his direction; but the darkness swallowed him up, and his flying steps woke no echo in the dust and slime underfoot. Baffled, confused, Godfrey turned back. Clutching at the packet he crept up to the tavern on

cautious feet, and examined what the man had given him by the glimmer of light from within.

He saw a cord fastening a bit of brownish stuff that seemed torn from a pilgrim's cloak. Wrapped in it was a rough wooden cross, folded in a scented scrap of Tyrian gauze. Godfrey knew the scent, he knew the delicate scarf—they were hers. The gauze was torn from the veil in which she had wound their heads that evening on the balcony. . . And suddenly, in the same instant, he knew the man who had started up so mysteriously out of the darkness, and then vanished into it again. It was the haggard pilgrim he had questioned in the church of Saint George of the Latins at Famagusta, the man who had said to him: "Will you leave all and come with us, sir page?" And the cross—did he not know that, too? He lifted it to the light, held it closer, and recognized it for the cross the strange preaching woman in the church had worn at her girdle, the cross he had stooped to kiss when she promised to pray for the Princess Medea. . .

Alone there in the dark, clutching the cross to him, grown lad that he was, and a princess's champion, Godfrey burst into sobs. For he understood at last that God had stolen his lady from him, and that the vessel he had seen from his window an hour earlier, speeding away before the wind, was bearing the Princess Medea, and with her the pilgrim woman who had vowed to save her from the ruin of her house.

Years later, long after that ruin had fallen, and all the burning dream was over, Godfrey the Prior, an old man, sat in a gray Norman abbey, and heard from a wandering monk back from the Holy Places how the saintly Bridget of Sweden had forsaken her great estate, and her seat in the king's court, to go through the world denouncing evil in high places. And the friar said that one day she had stood in the market-place of Famagusta, and foretold to the mocking crowd the woe that was to fall on the land of Cyprus two short years later, and the doom of their kings. But in what country and what convent the Princess Medea had taken refuge the monk could not say, for of her he had never heard men speak.

THE REFUGEES

I

ON the 8th of September, 1914, Charlie Durand stood helplessly blinking through his spectacles at the throng of fugitives which the Folkestone train had just poured out upon the platform of Charing Cross.

He was aware of a faint haze on the spectacles which he usually kept clear of the slightest smirch. It had been too prolonged, too abominable, too soul-searching, the slow torture of his hours of travel with the stricken multitude in which he had found himself entangled on the pier at Boulogne.

Charlie Durand, Professor of Romance Languages in a western University, had been spending the first weeks of a hard-earned Sabbatical holiday in wandering through Flanders and Belgium, and on the fatal second of August had found himself at Louvain, whose University, a year or two previously, had honoured him with a degree.

On the advice of the American consul he had left Belgium at once, and, deeply disturbed by the dislocation of his plans, had carried his shaken nerves

to a lost corner of Normandy, where he had spent the ensuing weeks in trying to think the war would soon be over.

It was not that he was naturally hard or aloof about it, or wanted to be; but the whole business was so contrary to his conception of the universe, and his fagged mind, at the moment, was so incapable of prompt readjustment, that he needed time to steady himself. Besides, his conscience told him that his first duty was to get back unimpaired to the task which just enabled him to keep a mother and two sisters above want. His few weeks on the continent had cost much more than he had expected, and most of his remaining francs had gone to the various appeals for funds that penetrated even to his lost corner; and he decided that the prudent course (now that everybody said the war was certainly going to last till November) would be to slip over to cheap lodgings in London, and bury his nose in the British Museum.

This decision, as it chanced, had coincided with the annihilation of Louvain and Malines. News of the rapid German advance had not reached him; but at Boulogne he found himself caught in the central eddy of fugitives, tossed about among them like one of themselves, pitched on the boat with them, dealt with compassionately but firmly by the fagged officials at Folkestone, jammed into a cranny of the

endless train, had chocolate and buns thrust on him by ministering angels with high heels and powdered noses, and shyly passed these refreshments on to the fifteen dazed fellow-travellers packed into his compartment.

His first impulse was to turn back and fly the sight at any cost. But his luggage had already passed out of his keeping, and he had not the courage to forsake it. Moreover, a slight congenital lameness made flight in such circumstances almost impossible. So after a fugitive had come down heavily on his lame foot he resigned himself to keeping in the main current and letting it sweep him onto the boat.

Once on board, he had hastened to isolate himself behind a funnel, in an airless corner reeking of oil and steam, while the refugees, abandoned to unanimous seasickness, became for the time an indistinguishable animal welter. But the run to London had brought him into closer contact with them. It was impossible to sit for three mortal hours with an unclaimed little boy on one's lap, opposite a stony-faced woman holding a baby that never stopped crying, and not give them something more than what remained of one's chocolate and buns. The woman with the child was bad enough; though perhaps less perversely moving than the little blonde thing with long soiled gloves who kept staring straight ahead and moaning: *"My furs—oh, my furs."* But worst of all

was the old man at the other end of the compartment: the motionless old man in a frayed suit of professorial black, with a face like a sallow bust on a bracket in a university library.

It was the face of Durand's own class and of his own profession, and it struck him as something not to be contemplated without dire results to his nervous system. He was glad the old man did not speak to him, but only waved away with a silent bow the sandwich he offered; and glad that he himself was protected by a slight stammer (which agitation always increased) from any attempt at sustained conversation with the others. But in spite of these safeguards the run to London was dreadful.

On the platform at Charing Cross he stood motionless, trying to protect his lame leg and yet to take up as little room as possible, while he waited for the tide to flow by and canalize itself. There was no way in which he could help the doomed wretches: he kept repeating that without its affording him the least relief. He had given away his last available penny, keeping barely enough to pay for a few frugal weeks in certain lodgings he knew of off Bedford Square; and he could do nothing for the moment but take up as little space as possible till a break in the crowd should let him hobble through to freedom. But that might not be for another hour; and meanwhile, helplessly, he gazed at the scene through misty spectacles.

The refugees were spread out about him in a stagnant mass, through which, over which, almost, there squeezed, darted, skimmed and criss-crossed the light battalions of the benevolent. People with badges were everywhere, philanthropists of both sexes and all ages, sorting, directing, exhorting, contradicting, saying "Wee, wee," and "Oh, no," and "This way, please —oh, dear, what *is* 'this way' in French?", and "I beg your pardon, but that bed-warmer belongs to *my* old woman"; and industriously adding, by all the means known to philanthropy, to the distress and bewilderment of their victims.

Durand saw the old Professor who had travelled with him slip by alone, as if protected by his silent dignity. He saw other faces that held benevolence at bay. One or two erect old women with smooth hair and neat black bonnets gave him a sharper pang than the drooping and dishevelled; and he watched, with positive anguish, a mother pausing to straighten her little boy's collar. But what on earth could one do for any one of them?

Suddenly he was aware of a frightened touch on his arm.

"Oh, Monsieur, je vous en prie, venez! *Do* come!"

The voice was a reedy pipe, the face that of a little elderly lady so dry and diaphanous that she reminded him, in her limp dust-coloured garments, of

a last year's moth shaken out of the curtains of an empty room.

"Je vous en *prie,*" she repeated, with a plaintive stress on the last word. Her intonation was not exactly French; he supposed it was some variety of provincial Belgian, and wondered why it sounded so unlike anything he had been hearing. Her face was as wild as anything so small and domesticated could be. Tears were running down her cheeks, and the hand on his sleeve twitched in its cotton glove.

"Mais oui—mais oui," he found himself reassuring her. Her look of anxiety disappeared, and as he drew the cotton glove through his arm the tears seemed to be absorbed into her pale wrinkles.

"So many of them obviously want to be left alone; here's one who wants to be looked after," he thought to himself, with a whimsical satisfaction in the discovery, as he yielded to the pull on his arm.

He was of a retiring nature, and compassion, far from making him expansive, usually contracted his faculties to the point of cowardice; but the scenes he had traversed were so far beyond any former vision of human wretchedness that all the defences of his gentle egotism had broken down, and he found himself suddenly happy, and almost proud, at having been singled out as a rescuer. He understood the passionate wish of all the rescuers to secure a refugee and carry him or her away in triumph against all

competitors; and while his agile mind made a rapid sum in division his grasp tightened on the little old lady's arm, and he muttered to himself: "They shan't take her from me if I have to live on dry bread."

With a victim on his arm—and one who looked the part so touchingly—it was easier to insinuate his way through the crowd, and he fended off all the attempts of fair highwaymen to snatch his prize from him with an energy in which the prize ably seconded him.

"No, no, *no!*" she repeated, in mild piping English, tightening her clutch as he tightened his; and presently he discovered that she had noticed his lameness, and with her free hand was making soft defensive dabs at the backs and ribs that blocked their advance.

"You're lame, too—did *they* do it?" she whispered, falling into French again; and he said, chivalrously: "Oh, yes—but it wasn't their fault. . ."

"The savages! I shall *never* feel in that way about them—though it's noble of you," she murmured; and the inconsequence of this ferocity toward her fellow-sufferers struck him as refreshingly feminine. Like most shy men he was dazzled by unreasonable women.

"Are you in very great pain?" she continued, as they reached the street.

"Oh no—not at all. I beg you won't. . . The

trouble is—" he broke off, confronted by an unforeseen difficulty.

"What *is* your trouble?" she sighed, leaning her little head toward him.

"Why—I—the fact is, I don't know London . . . or England . . . *jamais été,*" he confessed, merging the two languages in a vain effort at fluency.

"But of course—why should you? Only trust me. . ."

"Ah, you *do* know it, then?" What luck to have found a refugee who could take care of him! He vowed her half his worldly goods on the spot.

She was busy signalling a hansom, and did not answer.

"Is all this your luggage?" A porter had followed him with it. He felt that he ought to have been asking her for hers, but dared not, fearing a tragic answer. He supposed she had been able to bring away nothing but her threadbare cloak, and the little knobby bag that had been prodding his ribs ever since they had linked arms.

"How lucky to have been able to save so much!" she sighed, as his bags and boxes were hoisted to the hansom.

"Yes—in such a fight," he agreed; and wondered if she were a little flighty as she added: "I suppose you didn't bring your mattress? Not that it matters in the very least. Quick, get in!" she shrieked out,

pushing him past her into the hansom, and adding, as she scrambled in and snapped the doors shut: "My sister-in-law . . . she's so grasping . . . I don't want her to see us. . ." She pushed up the lid, and cried out a name unfamiliar to her companion, but to which horse and driver instantly responded.

Durand sank back without speaking. He was bewildered and disconcerted, and her last words had shocked him. "My sister-in-law . . . she's so grasping. . ." The refugees, then, poor souls, were torn by the same family jealousies as more prosperous mortals. Affliction was supposed to soften, but apparently in such monstrous doses it had the opposite effect. He had noticed, on the journey, symptoms of this reciprocal distrust among the herded creatures. It was no doubt natural . . . but he wished his little refugee had not betrayed the weakness.

The thought of the victim they were deserting (perhaps as helpless and destitute as his own waif) brought a protest to his stammering tongue.

"Ought—oughtn't we to take your sister-in-law with us? Hadn't we better turn back?"

"For Caroline? Oh, no, non, *no!*" She screamed it in every tongue. "Cher monsieur, please! She's sure to have her own . . . such heaps of them. . ."

Ah—it was jealousy, then; jealousy of the more favoured sister-in-law, who was no doubt younger

and handsomer, and had been fought over by rival rescuers, while she, poor pet, had had to single one out for herself. Well, Durand felt he would not have exchanged her for a beauty—so frail, fluttered, plaintive did she seem, so small a vessel to contain so great a woe.

Suddenly it struck him that it was *she* who had given the order to the driver. He was more and more bewildered, and ashamed of his visible incompetence.

"Where are we going?" he faltered.

"For tea—there's plenty of time, I do assure you, and I'm fainting for a little food."

"So am I," he admitted; adding to himself: "I'll feed the poor thing, and then we'll see what's to be done."

How he wished he hadn't given away all but his last handful of shillings! His poverty had never been so humiliating to him. What right had he to be pretending to help a refugee? It was as much as he could do to pay the hansom and give her her tea. And then—? A dampness of fear broke over him, and he cursed his cowardice in not having told her at once to make another choice.

"But supposing nobody else had taken her?" he thought, stealing a look at her small pointed profile and the pale wisps of hair under her draggled veil. Her insignificance was complete, and he decided that he had probably been her last expedient.

It would be odd if it proved that she was also his. He remembered hearing that some of the rich refugees had been able to bring their money with them, and his mind strayed away to the whimsical possibility of being offered a post with emoluments by the frightened creature who was so determined not to let him go.

"If only I knew London," he thought regretfully, "I might be worth a good salary to her. The queer thing is that she seems to know it herself. . ."

Both sat silent, absorbed in their emotions.

It was certainly an odd way to be seeing London for the first time; but he was glad to be travelling at horse-pace, instead of whirling through his thronged sensations in a taxi.

"Trafalgar Square—yes. How clever of you! *Les lions de milord Nelsonne!*" she explained.

They drove on, past palaces and parks.

"Maison du grand Duc . . . Arc de triomphe de marbre," she successively enlightened him, sounding like a gnat in a megaphone. He leaned and gazed, forgetting her and himself in an ecstasy of assimilation. In the golden autumn haze London loomed mightier and richer than his best dreams of it. . .

II

The hansom stopped, and they entered a modest tea-room which was not too densely crowded.

"I wanted to get away from that awful mob," she explained, pushing back her veil as they seated themselves at a table with red and white napkins and a britannia sugar-bowl.

"Crumpets—lots of crumpets and jam," she instructed a disdainful girl in a butterfly cap, who languished away with the order to the back of the shop.

Durand sat speechless, overwhelmed by his predicament. Tea and crumpets were all very well—but afterward? He felt that his silence was becoming boorish, and leaned forward over the metal tea-pot. At the same instant, his protégée leaned too, and simultaneously they brought out the question:

{ "Where were *you* when it broke out?"
{ "Where were *you* when it broke out?"

"At Louvain," he answered; and she shuddered.

"Louvain—how terrible!"

"And you, Madame?"

"I? At Brussels. . ."

"How terrible!" he echoed.

"Yes." Her eyes filled with tears. "I had such kind friends there."

"Ah—of course. Naturally."

She poured the tea, and pushed his cup to him. The haughty girl reappeared with sodden crumpets, which looked to him like manna steeped in nectar. He tossed off his tea as if it had been champagne, and courage began to flow through his veins. Never

would he desert the simple creature who had trusted him! Let no one tell him that an able-bodied man with brains and education could not earn enough, in the greatest city in the world, to support himself and this poor sparrow.

The sparrow had emptied her cup, too, and a soft pink suffused her cheeks, effacing the wrinkles, which had perhaps been only lines of worry. He began to wonder if, after all, she were much more than forty. . . Rather absurd for a man of his age to have been calling a woman of forty an "old lady"!

Suddenly he saw that the sense of security, combined with the hot tea and the crumpets, was beginning to act on her famished system like a dangerous intoxicant, and that she was going to tell him everything—or nearly everything. She bent forward, her elbows on the table, the cotton gloves drawn off her thin hands, which were nervously clenched under her chin. He noticed a large sapphire on one of them.

"I can't tell you. . . I can't tell you how happy I am," she faltered with swimming eyes.

He remained silent, through sheer embarrassment, and she went on: "You see, I'd so completely lost hope—so completely. I thought no one would ever want me. . . They all told me at home that no one would—my nieces did, and everybody. They taunted me with it." She broke off, and glanced at him

appealingly. "You *do* understand English, don't you?"

He assented, still more bewildered, and she went on: "Oh, then it's so much easier—then we can really talk. (No—our train doesn't leave for nearly two hours.) You don't mind my talking, do you? You'll let me make a clean breast of it? I *must!*"

She touched with a claw-like finger the narrow interval between her shoulders, and added: "For weeks I've been simply suffocating with longing. . ."

An uncomfortable redness rose to Charlie Durand's forehead. With these foreign women you could never tell: his brief continental experiences had taught him that. After all, he was not a monster, and several ladies had already attempted to prove it to him. There had been one adventure—on the way home to his hotel at Louvain, after dining with the curator of Prehistoric Antiquities—one adventure of which he could not think even now without feeling as if he were in a Turkish bath, with no marble slab to cool off on.

But this poor lady—! Of course he was mistaken. He blushed anew at his mistake. . .

"They all laughed at me—jeered at me—Caroline and my nieces and all of them. They said it was no use trying—they'd failed, and how was *I* going to succeed? Even Caroline has failed hitherto—and

she's so dreadfully determined. And of course for a married woman it's always easier, isn't it?"

She appealed to him with anxious eyes, and his own sank behind his protecting spectacles. Easier for a married woman—! After all, perhaps he hadn't been mistaken. He had heard, of course, that in the highest society the laxity was even worse. . .

"It's true enough," (she seemed to be answering him), "that the young good-looking women got everything away from us. There's nothing new in that: they always have. I don't know how they manage it; but I'm told they were on hand when the very first boat-load of refugees arrived. I understand the young Duchess of Bolchester and Lady Ivy Trantham were down at Folkestone with all the Trantham motors—and from that day to this, though we've all had our names down on the government list, not one of us—not one human being at Lingerfield—has had so much as an application from the Committee. And when I couldn't stand it any longer, and said I was going up to town myself, to wait at the station and seize one of the poor things before any of those unscrupulous women had got him, they said it was just like me to make a show of myself for nothing. . . But, after all, you see Caroline sneaked off after me without saying anything, and was making a show of herself, too. And when I saw her she evidently hadn't succeeded, for she was running about all alone, looking as wild

as she does on sales days at Harrod's. Caroline is very extravagant, and doesn't mind what she spends; but she never can make up her mind between bargains, and rushes about like a madwoman till it's too late.—But, oh, how humiliating for her to go back to the Hall without a single refugee!" The speaker broke off with a laugh of triumph, and wiped away her tears.

Charlie Durand sat speechless. The crumpet had fallen from his fork, and his tea was turning gray; but he was unconscious of such minor misfortunes.

"I don't . . . I don't understand . . ." he began; but as he spoke he perceived that he did.

It was as clear as daylight: he and his companion had reciprocally taken each other for refugees, and she was pressing upon him the assistance he had been wondering how on earth he should manage to offer her!

"Of course you don't. . . I explain so badly . . . they've always told me that . . ." she went on eagerly. "Fancy my asking you if you'd brought your mattress, for instance—what you must have thought! But the fact is, I'd made up my mind you were going to be one of those poor old women in caps, who take snuff and spill things, and who have always come away with nothing but their beds and a saucepan. They all said at Lingerfield: 'If you get even a deaf old woman you're lucky'—and so I arranged to

give you—I mean her—one of the rooms in the post-mistress's cottage, where I've put an old bedstead that the vicar's coachman's mother died in, but the mattress had to be burnt . . . whereas of course now you're coming to *me*—to the Cottage, I mean . . . and I haven't even told you where it is, or who I am. . . Oh, dear, it's so stupid of me; but you see Kathleen and Agatha and my sister-in-law all said: 'Of course poor Audrey'll never get anybody'; and I've had the room standing ready for three weeks—all *but* the mattress; till even the vicar's wife had begun to joke about it with my brother—oh, my brother's Lord Beausedge—didn't I tell you?"

She paused breathless, and then added with embarrassment: "I don't think I ever made such a long speech in my life."

He was sure she hadn't, for as she poured out her confession it had been borne in on him that he was listening not to an habitual babbler, but to the uncontrollable outburst of a shy woman grown inarticulate through want of listeners. It was harrowing, the arrears of self-confession that one guessed behind her torrent of broken phrases.

"I can't tell you," she began again, as if she had perceived his sympathy, "the difference it's going to make for me at home: my bringing back the first refugee, and it's being . . . well, some one like *you*. . ."

Her blushes deepened, and she lost herself again in the abasing sense of her inability to explain.

"Well, my name at any rate," she burst out, "is Audrey Rushworth . . . and I'm not married."

"Neither am I," said her guest, smiling. American-fashion, he was groping to produce a card. It would really not be decent in him to keep up the pretence a moment longer, and here was an easy way to let her know of her mistake. He pushed the card toward her, and as he did so his eye fell on it, and he saw, too late, that it was one of those he had rather fatuously had engraved in French for his continental travels.

CHARLES DURAND

PROFESSEUR DES LANGUES ROMANES
À L'UNIVERSITÉ DE LA SALLE
DOCTEUR DES LETTRES DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE LOUVAIN

She scanned the inscription and raised a reverent glance to him. *"Monsieur le Professeur—?* I'd no idea . . . though I suppose I ought to have known at once. . . Oh, I do hope," she cried, "you won't find Lingerfield too unbearably dull!" She added, as

if it were wrung from her: "Some people think my nieces rather clever."

The Professor of Romance Languages sat fascinated by the consequences of his last blunder. That card seemed to have been dealt out by the finger of fate. Supposing he went to Lingerfield with her—just to see what it was like? He had always pined to see what an English country-seat was like; and Lingerfield was apparently important. He shook off the mad notion with an effort. "I'll drive with her to the station," he thought, "and just lose myself in the crowd. That will be the easiest way."

"There are three of them—Agatha, Kathleen and Clio. . . But you'll find us all hopelessly dull," he heard her repeating.

"I shall—I certainly shan't. . . I mean, of course, how could I?" he stammered.

It was so much like her own syntax that it appeared to satisfy her.

"No—*I* pay!" she cried, darting between him and the advancing waitress. "Shall we walk? It's only two steps—" and, seeing him look about for the vanished hansom, "Oh, I sent the luggage on at once by the cab-driver. You see, there's a good deal of it, and there's such a hideous rush at the booking-office at this hour. He'll have given it to a porter—so please don't worry!"

Firm and elastic as a girl she sprang through the

doorway, while, limping at her side, he stared at the decisive fact that his luggage was once more out of his keeping.

III

Charlie Durand (his shaving glass told him) was forty-five, decidedly bald, with an awkward limp, scant-lashed blue eyes blinking behind gold spectacles, a brow that he believed to be thoughtful and a chin that he knew to be weak.

His height was medium, his figure sedentary, with the hollows and prominences in the wrong places; and he wore ready-made clothes in protective colours, and square-toed boots with side-elastics, and stammered whenever it was all-important to speak fluently.

But his sister Mabel, who knew him better than the others, had once taken one of his cards and run a pen through the word "Languages," leaving simply "Professor of Romance"; and in his secret soul Charlie Durand knew that she was right.

He had, in truth, a dramatic imagination without the power of expression; instead of writing novels, he read them; instead of living adventures, he dreamed them. Being naturally modest he had long since discovered his limitations, and decided that all his imagination would ever do for him was to give him a greater freedom of judgment than his neigh-

bours. Even that was something to be thankful for; but now he began to ask himself if it were enough. . .

Professor Durand had read "L'Abbesse de Jouarre", and knew that, in moments of extreme social peril, superior persons often felt themselves justified in casting conventional morality to the winds. He had no thought of proceeding to such extremes; but he did wonder if, at the hour when civilization was shaken to its base, he, Charlie Durand, might not at last permit himself forty-eight hours of romance. . .

His audacity was fortified by the fact that his luggage was out of his control, for he could hardly picture any situation more subversive than that of being separated from his tooth-brush and his reading-glasses. But the difficulty of explaining himself if he went any farther in the adventure loomed larger as they approached the station; and as they crossed its crowded threshold, and Miss Rushworth said: "Now we'll see about your things", he saw a fresh possibility of escape, and cried out: "No—no; please find places —I'll look for my luggage."

He felt on his arm the same inexorable grasp that had steered him through the labyrinth of Charing Cross.

"You're quite right. We'll get our seats first; in such a crowd it's safer!" she answered gaily, and guided him toward a second-class compartment (he

had always heard the aristocracy travelled second class in England). "Besides," she continued, as she pounced on two corner seats, "the luggage is sure to be in the van already. Or, if it isn't, you'd never find it. All the refugees in England seem to be travelling by this train!"

They did indeed—and how tell her that there was one less in the number than she imagined? A new difficulty had only just occurred to him. It was easy enough to explain to her that she had been mistaken; but if he did, how justify the hours he had already spent in her company? Could he tell the sister of Lord Beausedge that he had taken her for a refugee?

Desperation nerved him to unconsidered action. The train was not leaving yet—there was still time for the confession.

He scrambled to the seat opposite his captor's and rashly spoke. "I ought to tell you. . . I must apologize—apologize abjectly—for not explaining sooner. . ."

Miss Rushworth turned pale, and leaning forward caught him by the wrist.

"Ah, don't go on—" she gasped.

He lost his last hold on self-possession.

"Not go on—?"

"Don't you suppose I know—didn't you guess that I knew all along?"

He paled too, and then crimsoned, all his old suspicions rushing back on him.

"How could I not," she pursued, "when I saw all those heaps of luggage? Of course I knew at once that you were rich, and didn't need . . ." her wistful eyes were wet . . . "need anything *I* could do for you. But you looked so lonely . . . and your lameness, and the moral anguish. . . I don't see, after all, why we should open our houses *only* to pauper refugees; and it's not my fault, is it, if the Committee simply wouldn't send me any?"

"But . . . but . . ." he desperately began; and then all at once his stammer caught him, and an endless succession of b-b-b- issued from his helpless throat.

With exquisite tact Miss Rushworth smiled away his confusion.

"I won't listen to another word . . . not one!—Oh, duck your head—*quick!*" she shrieked in another voice, flattening herself back into her corner.

Durand recognized the same note of terror with which she had hailed her sister-in-law's approach at Charing Cross. It was needless for her to add faintly: "Caroline."

As she did so, a plumed and determined head surged up into the window-frame, and an astonished voice exclaimed: "Audrey!"

A moment later four ladies, a maid laden with parcels, and two bushy Chow dogs, had possessed themselves of all that remained of the compartment; and Durand, as he squeezed himself into his corner, was feeling the relief which comes with the cessation of virtuous effort. He had seen at a glance that there was nothing more to be done.

The young ladies with Lady Beausedge were visibly her daughters. They were of graduated heights, beginning with a very tall one, and were all thin, conspicuous and queerly dressed, suggesting to the bewildered Professor bad copies of originals he had never seen. None of them took any notice of him, and the dogs, after smelling his ankles, contemptuously followed their example.

It would indeed have been difficult, during the first moments, for any personality less masterful than Lady Beausedge's to assert itself in her presence. So prevalent was she that Durand found himself viewing her daughters, dogs and attendant as her mere fringes and attributes, and thinking with terror: "She's going to choose the seat next to me," when in reality it was only the youngest and thinnest of the girls who was settling herself at his side with a play of parcels as sharp as elbows.

Lady Beausedge was already assailing her sister-in-law.

"I'd no idea you were going up to town today,

Audrey. You said nothing of it when you dined with us last night."

Miss Rushworth's eyes fluttered apprehensively from Lady Beausedge's awful countenance to the timorous face of the Professor of Romance Languages, who had bought a newspaper and was deep in its inner pages.

"Neither did you, Caroline," Miss Rushworth began with unexpected energy; and the thin girl next to Durand laughed.

"Neither did I what?— What are you laughing at, Clio?"

"Neither did you say *you* were coming up to town, mother."

Lady Beausedge glared, and the other girls giggled. Even the maid stooped over the dogs to conceal an appreciative smile. It was evident that baiting Lady Beausedge was a popular if dangerous amusement.

"As it happens," said the lady of Lingerfield, "the Committee telephoned only this morning. . ."

Miss Rushworth's eyes brightened. She grew almost arch. "Ah—then you came up about refugees?"

"Naturally." Lady Beausedge shook out her boa and opened the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

"Such a fight!" groaned the tallest girl, who was also the largest, vividest and most expensively dressed.

"Yes . . . it was hardly worth while. . . Anything so grotesquely mismanaged. . ."

The young lady called Clio remarked in a quiet undertone: "Five people and two dogs to fetch down one old woman with a pipe. . ."

"Ah . . . you *have* got one?" murmured Miss Rushworth, with what seemed to Durand a malicious simulation of envy.

"Yes," her sister-in-law grudgingly admitted. "But, as Clio says, it's almost an insult to have dragged us all up to town. . . They'd promised us a large family, with a prima donna from the Brussels Opera (so useful for Agatha's music); and two orphans besides. . . I suppose Ivy Trantham got them all, as usual. . ." She paused, and added more condescendingly: "After all, Audrey, you were right not to try to do anything through the Committee."

"Yes; I think one does better without," Miss Rushworth replied with extreme gentleness.

"One does better without refugees, you mean? I daresay we shall find it so. I've no doubt the Bolchester set has taken all but the utterly impossible ones."

"Not *all*," said Miss Rushworth.

Something in her tone caused her nieces to exchange a glance, and Lady Beausedge to rear her head from the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

"Not *all*," repeated Miss Rushworth.

The eldest girls broke into an excited laugh. "Aunt Audrey—you don't mean *you've* got an old woman with a pipe too?"

"No. Not an old woman." She paused, and waved her hand in Durand's direction. "Monsieur le Professeur Durand, de l'Université de Louvain. . . My sister-in-law, my nieces . . . (*He speaks English*)," she added in a whisper.

IV

Charlie Durand's window was very low and wide, and quaintly trellised. There was no mistaking it: it was a "lattice"—a real one, with old bluish panes set in black mouldings, not the stage variety made of plate-glass and *papier maché* that he had seen in the sham "Cottage" of æsthetic suburbs at home.

When he pushed the window open a branch of yellow roses brushed his face, and a dewy clematis gazed in at him with purple eyes. Below lay a garden, incredibly velvety, flower-filled, and enclosed in yew-hedges so high that it seemed, under the low twilight sky, as intimate and shut in as Miss Rushworth's low-ceilinged drawing-room, which, in its turn, was as open to the air, and as full of flowers, as the garden.

But all England, that afternoon, as his train traversed it, had seemed like some great rich garden

roofed in from storm and dust and disorder. What a wonderful place, and what a miracle to have been thus carried into the very heart of it! All his scruples vanished in the enchantment of this first encounter with the English country.

When he had bathed and dressed, and descended the black oak stairs, he found his hostess waiting in the garden. She was hatless, with a pale scarf over her head, and a pink spot of excitement on each faded cheek.

"I should have preferred a quiet evening here; but since Caroline made such a point of our dining at the Hall—" she began.

"Of course, of course . . . it's all so lovely . . ." said her guest recklessly. He would have dined at Windsor Castle with composure. After the compact and quintessential magic of the Cottage nothing could surprise or overwhelm him.

They left the garden by a dark green door in a wall of old peach-coloured brick, and walked in the deepening twilight across a field and over a stile. A stile! He remembered pictures and ballads about helping girls over stiles, and lowered his eyes respectfully as Miss Rushworth's hand rested on his in the descent.

The next moment they were in the spacious shade of a sort of forest of Arden, with great groups of bossy trees standing apart, and deer flashing by at the end of ferny glades.

"Is it—are we—?"

"Oh, yes. This is Lingerfield. The Cottage is on the edge of the park. It's not a long walk, if we go by the chapel and through the cloisters."

The very words oppressed him with their too-crowding suggestions. There was a chapel in the park—there were cloisters! Lingerfield had an ecclesiastical past—had been an abbey, no doubt. But even such associations paled in the light of the reality. As they came out of the shadow of the trees they recovered a last glow of daylight. In it lay a gray chapel, delicately laced and pinnacled; and beyond the chapel the arcade of the cloister, a lawn with one domed cedar, and a long Tudor house, its bricks still rosy in the dusk, and a gleam of sunset caught in its windows.

"How—how long the daylight lasts in England!" said Professor Durand, choking with emotion.

The drawing-room into which he had followed Miss Rushworth seemed full of people and full of silence. Professor Durand had never had, on a social occasion, such an impression of effortless quiet. The ladies about the big stone chimney-piece and between the lamp-lit tables, if they had not been so modern in dress and attitude, might have been a part of the shadowy past.

Only Lady Beausedge, strongly corseted, many necklaced, her boa standing out from her bare shoul-

ders like an Elizabethan ruff, seemed to Durand majestic enough for her background. She suggested a composite image of Bloody Mary and the late Queen.

He was just recovering from the exchange of silences that had greeted his entrance when he discovered another figure worthy of the scene. It was Lord Beausedge, standing in the window, and glancing disgustedly over the evening paper.

Lord Beausedge was as much in character as his wife; only he belonged to a later period. He suggested stocks and nankeen trousers, a Lawrence portrait, port wine, fox-hunting, the Peninsular campaign, the Indian mutiny, every Englishman doing his duty, and resistance to the Reform Bill. It was portentous that one person, in modern clothes and reading a newspaper, should so epitomize a vanished age.

He made a step or two toward his guest, took him for granted, and returned to the newspaper.

"Why—why do we all fidget so in America?" Professor Durand wondered.

"Gwen and Ivy are always late," said Lady Beausedge, as though answering a silence.

Miss Rushworth looked agitated.

"Are they coming from Trantham?"

"Not him. Only Gwen and Ivy. Agatha telephoned, and Gwen asked if they might."

After that everyone sat silent again for a long

time, without any air of impatience or surprise. Durand had the feeling that they all—except perhaps Lord Beausedge—had a great deal to say to him, but that it would be very slow in coming to the surface. Well—so much the better; time was no consideration, and he was glad not to crowd his sensations.

"Do you know the Duchess?" asked Lady Beausedge suddenly.

"The Duchess—?"

"Gwen Bolchester. She's coming. She wants to see you."

"To see *me?*"

"When Agatha telephoned that you were here she chucked a dinner somewhere else, and she's rushing over from Trantham with her sister-in-law."

Durand looked helplessly at Miss Rushworth and saw that her cheeks were pink with triumph. The Duchess of Bolchester was coming to see her refugee!

"Do people here just chuck dinners like that?" he asked, with a faint facetiousness.

"When they want to," said Lady Beausedge simply. The conversation again came to a natural end.

It revived with feverish vivacity on the entrance of two tall and emaciated young women, who drifted in after Lord Beausedge had decided to ring for dinner, and who wasted none of their volubility in excusing their late arrival.

The newcomers, who had a kind of limp loveliness totally unknown to the Professor of Romance Languages, he guessed to be the Duchess of Bolchester and Lady Ivy Trantham, the most successful refugee-raiders of the district. They were dressed in pale frail garments and hung with barbaric beads and bangles, and as soon as he saw them he understood why he had thought the daughters of the house looked like bad copies—all except the youngest, whom he was beginning to single out from her sisters.

He was not sure if, during the murmur of talk that followed, some one breathed his name to the newcomers; but certainly no one told him which of the two ladies was which, or indeed made any effort to draw him into the conversation. It was only when the slightly less tall addressed the tallest as "Gwen" that he remembered this name was the Duchess's.

She had swept him with a smiling glance of her large sweet vacant eyes, and he had the impression that she too had things to say to him, but that the least strain on her attention was too great an effort, and that each time she was about to remember who he was something else distracted her.

The thought that a Duchess had chucked a dinner to see him had made him slightly giddy; and the humiliation of finding that, once they were confronted, she had forgotten what she had come for, was painful even to his disciplined humility.

But Professor Durand was not without his modest perspicacity, and little by little he began to guess that this absence of concentration and insistence was part of a sort of leisurely holiday spirit unlike anything he had ever known. Under the low-voiced volubility and restless animation of these young women (whom the daughters of the house intensely imitated), he felt a great central inattention. Their strenuousness was not fatiguing because it did not insist, but blew about like thistledown from topic to topic. He saw that his safety lay in this, and reassurance began to steal over him as he understood that the last danger he was exposed to was that of being too closely scrutinized or interrogated.

"If I'm an impostor," he thought, "at least no one here will find it out."

And, then, just as he had drawn this sage conclusion, he felt the sudden pounce of the Duchess's eye. Dinner was over, and the party had re-grouped itself in a great book-panelled room, before the carved chimney-piece of which she stood lighting her cigarette, like a Duchess on the cover of a novel.

"You know I'm going to carry you off presently," she said.

Miss Audrey Rushworth was sitting in a sofa corner beside her youngest niece, whom she evidently found less intimidating than the others. Durand, instinctively glancing toward them, saw the elder lady

turn pale, while Miss Clio Rushworth's swinging foot seemed to twinkle with malice.

He bowed as he supposed one ought to bow when addressed by a Duchess.

"Off for a talk?" he hazarded playfully.

"Off to Trantham. Didn't they tell you? I'm giving a big garden-party for the Refugee Relief Fund, and I'm looking for somebody to give us a lecture on Atrocities. That's what I came for," she added ingenuously.

There was a profound silence, which Lord Beausedge, lifting his head from the *Times*, suddenly broke.

"Damned bad taste, all that sort of thing," he remarked, and continued his reading.

"But, Gwen, dear," Miss Rushworth faltered, "your garden-party isn't till the twentieth."

The Duchess looked surprised. She evidently had no head for dates. "Isn't it, Aunt Audrey? Well, it doesn't matter, does it? I want him all the same—we want him awfully, Ivy, don't we?" She shone on Durand. "You'll see such lots of your own people at Trantham. The Belgian Minister and the French Ambassador are coming down for the lecture. You'll feel less lonely there."

Lady Beausedge intervened with authority. "I think I have a prior claim, my dear Gwen. Of course Audrey was not expecting any one—any one like Pro-

fessor Durand; and at the Cottage he might . . . he might . . . but *here*, with your uncle, and the girls all speaking French. . ." She turned to Durand with a hospitable smile.

"Your room's quite ready; and of course my husband will be delighted if you like to use the library to prepare your lecture in. We'll send the governess-cart for your traps tomorrow." She fixed her firm eyes on the Duchess. "You see, dear, it was all quite settled before you came."

Lady Ivy Trantham spoke up. "It's not a bit of use, Aunt Carry. Gwen can't give him up." (Being apparently unable to master the Professor's name, the sister-in-law continued to designate him by the personal pronoun). "The Committee has given us a prima donna from the Brussels Opera to sing the Marseillaise, and the what d'ye-call-it Belgian anthem, but there are lots of people coming just for the Atrocities."

"Oh, we must have the Atrocities," the Duchess echoed. She looked musingly at Durand's pink troubled face. "He'll do them awfully well," she concluded, talking about him as if he were deaf.

"We must have somebody who's accustomed to lecturing. People won't put up with amateurs," Lady Ivy reinforced her.

Lady Beausedge's countenance was dark with rage.

"A prima donna from the Brussels Opera! But the

Committee telephoned me this morning to come up and meet a prima donna. . . It's all a mistake *her* being at Trantham, Gwen."

"Well," said the Duchess serenely, "I daresay it's all a mistake *his* being here." She looked more and more tenderly on the Professor.

"But he's not here; he's with me at the Cottage!" cried Miss Rushworth, springing up with sudden resolution. "It's too absurd and undignified, this . . . squabbling. . ."

"Yes; don't let's squabble. Come along," said the Duchess, slipping her long arm through Durand's as Miss Rushworth's had been slipped through it at Charing Cross.

The subject of this flattering but agitating discussion had been struggling, ever since it began, with a nervous contraction of the throat. When at length his lips opened only a torrent of consonants rushed from them, finally followed by the cryptic monosyllables: "—I'm *not!*"

"Not a professional? Oh, but you're a Professor—that'll do," cried Lady Ivy Trantham briskly; while the Duchess, hugging his arm closer, added in a voice of persuasion: "You see, we've got one at Trantham already, and we're so awfully afraid of him that we want you to come and talk to him. You *must*."

"I mean, n-n-not a r-r-ref—" gasped out the desperate Durand.

Suddenly he felt his other arm caught by Miss Clio Rushworth, who gave it a deep and eloquent pinch. At the same time their eyes met, and he read in hers entreaty, command, and the passionate injunction to follow her lead.

"Poor Professor Durand—you'll take us for Red Indians on the war-trail! Come to the dining-room with me and I'll give you a glass of Perrier. I saw the curry was too strong for you," this young lady insinuatingly declared.

Durand, with one of his rare flashes of self-possession, had converted his stammer into a strangling cough, and, released by the Duchess, made haste to follow his rescuer out of the room. He kept up his cough while they crossed the hall, and by the time they reached the dining-room tears of congestion were running down behind his spectacles, and he sank into a chair and rested his elbows despairingly on a corner of the great mahogany table.

Miss Clio Rushworth disappeared behind a screen and returned with a glass of Perrier. "Anything in it?" she enquired pleasantly, and smiled at his doleful gesture of negation.

He emptied his glass and cleared his throat; but before he could speak she held up a silencing hand.

"Don't—don't!" she said.

He was startled by this odd echo of her aunt's en-

treaty, and a little tired of being hurled from one cryptic injunction to another.

"Don't what?" he asked sharply.

"Make a clean breast of it. Not yet. Pretend you *are*, just a little longer, please."

"Pretend I am—?"

"A refugee." She sat down opposite him, her sharp chin supported on crossed hands. "I'll tell you why—"

But Professor Durand was not listening. A momentary rapture of relief at being found out had been succeeded by a sick dread of the consequences. He tried to read the girl's thin ironic face, but her eyes and smile were inscrutable.

"Miss Rushworth, at least let me tell you—"

She shook her head kindly but firmly. "That you're not a German spy in disguise? Bless you, don't you suppose I can guess what's happened? I saw it the moment we got into the railway carriage. I suppose you came over from Boulogne in the refugee train, and when poor dear Aunt Audrey pounced on you, you began to stammer and couldn't explain. . ."

Oh, the blessed balm of her understanding! He drew a deep breath of gratitude, and faltered, smiling back at her smile: "It was worse than that . . . much worse. . . I took *her* for a refugee too: we rescued each other!"

A peal of youthful mirth shook the mighty rafters

of the Lingerfield dining-room. Miss Clio Rushworth buried her face and sobbed.

"Oh, I see—I see—I see it all!"

"No you don't—not quite—not yet—" he gurgled back at her.

"Tell me, then; tell me everything!"

And he told her; told her quietly, succinctly and without a stammer, because under her cool kindly gaze he felt himself at last in an atmosphere of boundless comprehension.

"You see . . . the adventure fascinated me. . . I won't deny that," he ended, laying bare the last fold of his duplicity.

This, for the first time, seemed to stagger her.

"The adventure—an adventure with Aunt Audrey?"

They smiled at each other a little. "I meant, the adventure of England— I've never been in England before—and of a baronial hall: it *is* baronial? In short, of just exactly what's been happening to me. The novelty, you see—but how should you see?—was irresistible. The novelty, and all the old historic associations. England's in our blood, after all." He looked about him at the big dusky tapestried room. "Fancy having seen this kind of thing only on the stage! . . . Yes, I was drawn on by everything—by everything I saw and heard, from the moment I set foot in London. Of course, if I hadn't been I should

have found an opportunity of explaining—or I could have bolted away from her at the station."

"I'm so glad you didn't. That's what I'm coming to," said the girl. "You see, it's been—how shall I explain?—more than an adventure for Aunt Audrey. It's literally the first thing that's ever happened to her."

Professor Durand blushed to the roots of his hair.

"I don't understand," he said feebly.

"No. Of course not. Any more, I suppose, than *I* really understand what Lingerfield represents to an American. And you would have had to live at Lingerfield for generations and generations to understand Aunt Audrey. You see, nothing much ever happened to the unmarried women of her time. Most of them were just put away in cottages covered with clematis and forgotten. Aunt Audrey has always been forgotten—even the Refugee Committee forgot her. And my father and mother, and her other brothers and sisters, and my brother and sisters and I—I'm afraid we've always forgotten her too—"

"Not you," said Professor Durand with sudden temerity.

Miss Clio Rushworth smiled. "I'm very fond of her; and then I've been a little bit forgotten myself." She paused a moment, and continued: "All this would take too long to explain. But what I want to beg of you is this—let her have her adventure, give her her

innings, keep up the pretence a little longer. None of the others have guessed, and I promise to get you away safely before they do. Just let Aunt Audrey have her refugee for a bit, and triumph over Lingerfield and Trantham.—The Duchess? Oh, I'll arrange that too. Slip back to the Cottage now—this way, across the lawn, by the chapel—and I'll say your cough was so troublesome that you rushed off to put on a mustard plaster. I'll tell Gwen you'll be delighted to give the lecture—"

Durand raised his hands in protest, but she went on: "Why, don't you see that the more you hold out the more she'll want you? Whereas, if you accept at once, and even let her think you're going over to stop at Trantham as soon as your cold is better, she'll forget she's ever asked you.—Insincere, you say? Yes, of course; a *little*. But have you considered what would have happened if you hadn't choked just now, and had succeeded in shouting out before everybody that you were an impostor?"

A cold chill ran down Charlie Durand's spine as his masterful adviser set forth this aspect of the case.

"Yes—I do see. . . I see it's for the best . . ." he stammered.

"Well—rather!" She pushed him toward a glass door opening on the lawn. "Be off now—and do play up, won't you? I'll promise to stick by you and see you out of it, if only you'll do as I ask."

Their hands met in a merry grasp of complicity, and as he fled away through the moonlight he carried with him the vision of her ugly vivid face, and wondered how such a girl could ever think she could be forgotten.

V

A good many things had happened before he stood again on the pier at Boulogne.

It was in April 1918, and he was buttoned into a too-tight uniform, on which he secretly hoped the Y.M.C.A. initials were not always the first things to strike the eye of the admiring spectator.

It was not that he was ungrateful to the great organization which had found a task for him in its ranks; but that he could never quite console himself for the accident of having been born a few years too soon to be wearing the real uniform of his country. That would indeed have been Romance beyond his dreams; but he had long ago discovered that he was never to get beyond the second-best in such matters. None of his adventures would ever be written with a capital.

Still, he was very content; and never more so than now that he was actually in France again, in touch and in sound of the mighty struggle that had once been more than his nerves could bear, but that they could bear now with perfect serenity because he and

his country, for all they were individually worth, had a stake in the affair, and were no longer mere sentimental spectators.

The scene, novel as it was because of the throngs of English and American troops that animated it, was still, in some of its details, pathetically familiar. For the German advance in the north had set in movement the native populations of that region, and among the fugitives some forlorn groups had reached Boulogne and were gathered on the pier, much as he had seen them four years earlier. Only in this case, they were in dozens instead of hundreds, and the sight of them was harrowing more because of what they symbolized than from their actual numbers.

Professor Durand was no more in quest of refugees than he had been formerly. He had been despatched to Boulogne to look after the library of a Y.M.C.A. canteen, and was standing on the pier looking about him for a guide with the familiar initials on his collar.

In the general confusion he could discover no one who took the least interest in his problem, and he was waiting resignedly in the sheltered angle formed by two stacks of packing-cases when he abruptly remembered that he had always known the face he was looking at was not one to forget.

It was that of a dark thin girl in khaki, with a slouch hat and leggings, and her own unintelligible

initials on her shoulder, who was giving firm directions to a large orderly in a British army motor.

As Durand looked at her she looked at him. Their eyes met, and she burst out laughing.

"Well, you do have the queerest looking tunics in your army!" she exclaimed as their hands clasped.

"I know we do—and I'm too fat. But you knew me?" he cried triumphantly.

"Why, of course! I should know your spectacles anywhere," said Miss Clio Rushworth gaily. She finished what she was saying to the orderly, and then came back to the Professor.

"What a lark! What are you? Oh, Y.M.C.A., of course. With the British, I suppose?" They perched on the boxes and exchanged confidences, while Durand inwardly hoped that the man who ought to be looking for him was otherwise engaged.

Apparently he was, for their talk continued to ramble on through a happy labyrinth of reminiscences punctuated with laughter.

"And when your people found out—weren't they too awfully horrified?" he asked at last, blushing at the mere remembrance.

She shook her head with a smile. "They never did —nobody found out but father, and he laughed for a week. I wouldn't have had any one else know for the world. It would have spoilt all Aunt Audrey's

fun if Lingerfield had known you weren't a refugee. To this day you're her great Adventure."

"But how did you manage it? I don't see yet."

"Come in to our canteen tonight and I'll tell you." She stood up and shoved her cigarette case into the pocket of the tunic that fitted so much better than his.

"I tell you what—as your man hasn't turned up, come over to the canteen now, and see Aunt Audrey."

Professor Durand paled in an unmartial manner. "Oh, is Miss Rushworth here?"

"Rather! She's my chief. Come along."

"Your chief—?" He wavered again, his heart failing him.

"Really—won't it be better for me not to? Suppose —suppose she should remember me?"

Miss Rushworth's niece laughed. "I don't believe she will, she's so blind. Besides, what if she did? She's seen a good many refugees since your day. You see they've become rather a drug in the market, poor dears. And Aunt Audrey's got her head full of other things now."

She had started off at her long swift stride and he was hurrying obediently after her.

The big brown canteen was crowded with soldiers who were being variously refreshed by young ladies in trig khaki. At the other end of the main room,

Miss Clio Rushworth turned a corner and entered an office. Durand followed her.

At the office desk sat a lady with eye-glasses on a sharp nose. She wore a Colonel's uniform, with several decorations, and was bending over the desk busily writing.

A young girl in a nurse's dress stood beside her, as if waiting for an order, and flattened against the wall of the room sat a row of limp and desolate beings—too evidently refugees.

The Colonel lifted her head quickly and glanced at her niece with a resolute and almost forbidding eye.

"Not another refugee, Clio—not *one!* I absolutely refuse. We've not a hole left to put them in, and the last family you sent me went off with my mackintosh and my electric lamp."

She bent again sternly to her writing. As she looked up her glance strayed carelessly over Professor Durand's congested countenance, and then dropped to the desk without a sign of recognition.

"Oh, Aunt Audrey—not one, not just *one?*" the Colonel's niece pleaded.

"It's no use, my dear.—Now don't interrupt, please. —Here are the bulletins, Nurse."

Colonel Audrey Rushworth shut her lips with a snap and her pen drove on steadily over the sheets of official letter paper.

When Professor Durand and Clio Rushworth stood

outside of the canteen again in the spring sunshine they looked long at each other without speaking. Charlie Durand, under his momentary sense of relief, was aware of a distinct humiliation.

"I see I needn't have been afraid!" he said, forcing a laugh.

"I told you so. The fact is, Aunt Audrey has a lot of other things to think about nowadays. There's no danger of *her* being forgotten—it's she who does the forgetting now." She laid a commiserating hand on his arm. "I'm sorry—but you must excuse her. She's just been promoted again, and she's going to marry the Bishop of the Macaroon Islands next month."

MR. JONES

I

LADY JANE LYNKE was unlike other people: when she heard that she had inherited Bells, the beautiful old place which had belonged to the Lynkes of Thudeney for something like six hundred years, the fancy took her to go and see it unannounced. She was staying at a friend's near by, in Kent, and the next morning she borrowed a motor and slipped away alone to Thudeney-Blazes, the adjacent village.

It was a lustrous motionless day. Autumn bloom lay on the Sussex downs, on the heavy trees of the weald, on streams moving indolently, far off across the marshes. Farther still, Dungeness, a fitful streak, floated on an immaterial sea which was perhaps, after all, only sky.

In the softness Thudeney-Blazes slept: a few aged houses bowed about a duck-pond, a silvery spire, orchards thick with dew. Did Thudeney-Blazes ever wake?

Lady Jane left the motor to the care of the geese on a miniature common, pushed open a white gate into a field (the griffoned portals being padlocked),

and struck across the park toward a group of carved chimney-stacks. No one seemed aware of her.

In a dip of the land, the long low house, its ripe brick masonry overhanging a moat deeply sunk about its roots, resembled an aged cedar spreading immemorial red branches. Lady Jane held her breath and gazed.

A silence distilled from years of solitude lay on lawns and gardens. No one had lived at Bells since the last Lord Thudeney, then a penniless younger son, had forsaken it sixty years before to seek his fortune in Canada. And before that, he and his widowed mother, distant poor relations, were housed in one of the lodges, and the great place, even in their day, had been as mute and solitary as the family vault.

Lady Jane, daughter of another branch, to which an earldom and considerable possessions had accrued, had never seen Bells, hardly heard its name. A succession of deaths, and the whim of an old man she had never known, now made her heir to all this beauty; and as she stood and looked she was glad she had come to it from so far, from impressions so remote and different. "It would be dreadful to be used to it—to be thinking already about the state of the roof, or the cost of a heating system."

Till this her thirty-fifth year, Lady Jane had led an active, independent and decided life. One of several

daughters, moderately but sufficiently provided for, she had gone early from home, lived in London lodgings, travelled in tropic lands, spent studious summers in Spain and Italy, and written two or three brisk business-like little books about cities usually dealt with sentimentally. And now, just back from a summer in the south of France, she stood ankle-deep in wet bracken, and gazed at Bells lying there under a September sun that looked like moonlight.

"I shall never leave it!" she ejaculated, her heart swelling as if she had taken the vow to a lover.

She ran down the last slope of the park and entered the faded formality of gardens with clipped yews as ornate as architecture, and holly hedges as solid as walls. Adjoining the house rose a low deep-buttressed chapel. Its door was ajar, and she thought this of good augury: her forebears were waiting for her. In the porch she remarked fly-blown notices of services, an umbrella stand, a dishevelled door-mat: no doubt the chapel served as the village church. The thought gave her a sense of warmth and neighbourliness. Across the damp flags of the chancel, monuments and brasses showed through a traceried screen. She examined them curiously. Some hailed her with vocal memories, others whispered out of the remote and the unknown: it was a shame to know so little about her own family. But neither Crofts nor Lynkes had ever greatly distinguished themselves; they had

gathered substance simply by holding on to what they had, and slowly accumulating privileges and acres. "Mostly by clever marriages," Lady Jane thought with a faint contempt.

At that moment her eyes lit on one of the less ornate monuments: a plain sarcophagus of gray marble niched in the wall and surmounted by the bust of a young man with a fine arrogant head, a Byronic throat and tossed-back curls.

"Peregrine Vincent Theobald Lynke, Baron Clouds, fifteenth Viscount Thudeney of Bells, Lord of the Manors of Thudeney, Thudeney-Blazes, Upper Lynke, Lynke-Linnet—" so it ran, with the usual tedious enumeration of honours, titles, court and county offices, ending with: "Born on May 1st, 1790, perished of the plague at Aleppo in 1828." And underneath, in small cramped characters, as if crowded as an afterthought into an insufficient space: "Also His Wife."

That was all. No name, dates, honours, epithets, for the Viscountess Thudeney. Did she too die of the plague at Aleppo? Or did the "also" imply her actual presence in the sarcophagus which her husband's pride had no doubt prepared for his own last sleep, little guessing that some Syrian drain was to receive him? Lady Jane racked her memory in vain. All she knew was that the death without issue of this Lord Thudeney had caused the property to

revert to the Croft-Lynkes, and so, in the end, brought her to the chancel step where, shyly, she knelt a moment, vowing to the dead to carry on their trust.

She passed on to the entrance court, and stood at last at the door of her new home, a blunt tweed figure in heavy mud-stained shoes. She felt as intrusive as a tripper, and her hand hesitated on the door-bell. "I ought to have brought some one with me," she thought; an odd admission on the part of a young woman who, when she was doing her books of travel, had prided herself on forcing single-handed the most closely guarded doors. But those other places, as she looked back, seemed easy and accessible compared to Bells.

She rang, and a tinkle answered, carried on by a flurried echo which seemed to ask what in the world was happening. Lady Jane, through the nearest window, caught the spectral vista of a long room with shrouded furniture. She could not see its farther end, but she had the feeling that someone stationed there might very well be seeing her.

"Just at first," she thought, "I shall have to invite people here—to take the chill off."

She rang again, and the tinkle again prolonged itself; but no one came.

At last she reflected that the care-takers probably lived at the back of the house, and pushing open a

door in the court-yard wall she worked her way around to what seemed a stable-yard. Against the purple brick sprawled a neglected magnolia, bearing one late flower as big as a planet. Lady Jane rang at a door marked "Service." This bell, though also languid, had a wakefuller sound, as if it were more used to being rung, and still knew what was likely to follow; and after a delay during which Lady Jane again had the sense of being peered at—from above, through a lowered blind—a bolt shot, and a woman looked out. She was youngish, unhealthy, respectable and frightened; and she blinked at Lady Jane like someone waking out of sleep.

"Oh," said Lady Jane—"do you think I might visit the house?"

"The house?"

"I'm staying near here—I'm interested in old houses. Mightn't I take a look?"

The young woman drew back. "The house isn't shown."

"Oh, but not to—not to—" Jane weighed the case. "You see," she explained, "I know some of the family: the Northumberland branch."

"You're related, madam?"

"Well—distantly, yes." It was exactly what she had not meant to say; but there seemed no other way.

The woman twisted her apron-strings in perplexity.

"Come, you know," Lady Jane urged, producing half-a-crown. The woman turned pale.

"I couldn't, madam; not without asking." It was clear that she was sorely tempted.

"Well, ask, won't you?" Lady Jane pressed the tip into a hesitating hand. The young woman shut the door and vanished. She was away so long that the visitor concluded her half-crown had been pocketed, and there was an end; and she began to be angry with herself, which was more often her habit than to be so with others.

"Well, for a fool, Jane, you're a complete one," she grumbled.

A returning footstep, listless, reluctant—the tread of one who was not going to let her in. It began to be rather comic.

The door opened, and the young woman said in her dull sing-song: "Mr. Jones says that no one is allowed to visit the house."

She and Lady Jane looked at each other for a moment, and Lady Jane read the apprehension in the other's eyes.

"Mr. Jones? Oh?— Yes; of course, keep it. . ." She waved away the woman's hand.

"Thank you, madam." The door closed again, and Lady Jane stood and gazed up at the inexorable face of her old home.

II

"But you didn't get in? You actually came back without so much as a peep?"

Her story was received, that evening at dinner, with mingled mirth and incredulity.

"But, my dear! You mean to say you asked to see the house, and they wouldn't let you? *Who* wouldn't?" Lady Jane's hostess insisted.

"Mr. Jones."

"Mr. Jones?"

"He said no one was allowed to visit it."

"Who on earth is Mr. Jones?"

"The care-taker, I suppose. I didn't see him."

"Didn't see him either? But I never heard such nonsense! Why in the world didn't you insist?"

"Yes; why didn't you?" they all chorused; and she could only answer, a little lamely: "I think I was afraid."

"Afraid? *You,* darling?" There was fresh hilarity. "Of Mr. Jones?"

"I suppose so." She joined in the laugh, yet she knew it was true: she had been afraid.

Edward Stramer, the novelist, an old friend of her family, had been listening with an air of abstraction, his eyes on his empty coffee-cup. Suddenly, as the mistress of the house pushed back her chair, he looked across the table at Lady Jane. "It's odd: I've

just remembered something. Once, when I was a youngster, I tried to see Bells; over thirty years ago it must have been." He glanced at his host. "Your mother drove me over. And we were not let in."

There was a certain flatness in this conclusion, and someone remarked that Bells had always been known as harder to get into than any other house thereabouts.

"Yes," said Stramer; "but the point is that we were refused in exactly the same words. Mr. Jones said no one was allowed to visit the house."

"Ah—he was in possession already? Thirty years ago? Unsociable fellow, Jones. Well, Jane, you've got a good watch-dog."

They moved to the drawing-room, and the talk drifted to other topics. But Stramer came and sat down beside Lady Jane. "It is queer, though, that at such a distance of time we should have been given exactly the same answer."

She glanced up at him curiously. "Yes; and you didn't try to force your way in either?"

"Oh, no: it was not possible."

"So I felt," she agreed.

"Well, next week, my dear, I hope we shall see it all, in spite of Mr. Jones," their hostess intervened, catching their last words as she moved toward the piano.

"I wonder if we shall see Mr. Jones," said Stramer.

III

Bells was not nearly as large as it looked; like many old houses it was very narrow, and but one storey high, with servants' rooms in the low attics, and much space wasted in crooked passages and superfluous stairs. If she closed the great saloon, Jane thought, she might live there comfortably with the small staff which was the most she could afford. It was a relief to find the place less important than she had feared.

For already, in that first hour of arrival, she had decided to give up everything else for Bells. Her previous plans and ambitions—except such as might fit in with living there—had fallen from her like a discarded garment, and things she had hardly thought about, or had shrugged away with the hasty subversiveness of youth, were already laying quiet hands on her; all the lives from which her life had issued, with what they bore of example or admonishment. The very shabbiness of the house moved her more than splendours, made it, after its long abandonment, seem full of the careless daily coming and going of people long dead, people to whom it had not been a museum, or a page of history, but cradle, nursery, home, and sometimes, no doubt, a prison. If those marble lips in the chapel could speak! If she could hear some of their comments on the old house which had spread its silent shelter over their sins and sor-

rows, their follies and submissions! A long tale, to which she was about to add another chapter, subdued and humdrum beside some of those earlier annals, yet probably freer and more varied than the unchronicled lives of the great-aunts and great-grandmothers buried there so completely that they must hardly have known when they passed from their beds to their graves. "Piled up like dead leaves," Jane thought, "layers and layers of them, to preserve something forever budding underneath."

Well, all these piled-up lives had at least preserved the old house in its integrity; and that was worth while. She was satisfied to carry on such a trust.

She sat in the garden looking up at those rosy walls, iridescent with damp and age. She decided which windows should be hers, which rooms given to the friends from Kent who were motoring over, Stramer among them, for a modest house-warming; then she got up and went in.

The hour had come for domestic questions; for she had arrived alone, unsupported even by the old family housemaid her mother had offered her. She preferred to start afresh, convinced that her small household could be staffed from the neighbourhood. Mrs. Clemm, the rosy-cheeked old person who had curtsied her across the threshold, would doubtless know.

Mrs. Clemm, summoned to the library, curtsied

again. She wore black silk, gathered and spreading as to skirt, flat and perpendicular as to bodice. On her glossy false front was a black lace cap with ribbons which had faded from violet to ash-colour, and a heavy watch-chain descended from the lava brooch under her crochet collar. Her small round face rested on the collar like a red apple on a white plate: neat, smooth, circular, with a pursed-up mouth, eyes like black seeds, and round ruddy cheeks with the skin so taut that one had to look close to see that it was as wrinkled as a piece of old crackly.

Mrs. Clemm was sure there would be no trouble about servants. She herself could do a little cooking: though her hand might be a bit out. But there was her niece to help; and she was quite of her ladyship's opinion, that there was no need to get in strangers. They were mostly a poor lot; and besides, they might not take to Bells. There were persons who didn't. Mrs. Clemm smiled a sharp little smile, like the scratch of a pin, as she added that she hoped her ladyship wouldn't be one of them.

As for under-servants . . . well, a boy, perhaps? She had a great-nephew she might send for. But about women—under-housemaids—if her ladyship thought they couldn't manage as they were; well, she really didn't know. Thudeney-Blazes? Oh, she didn't think so. . . There was more dead than living

at Thudeney-Blazes . . . everyone was leaving there . . . or in the church-yard . . . one house after another being shut . . . death was everywhere, wasn't it, my lady? Mrs. Clemm said it with another of her short sharp smiles, which provoked the appearance of a frosty dimple.

"But my niece Georgiana is a hard worker, my lady; her that let you in the other day. . ."

"That didn't," Lady Jane corrected.

"Oh, my lady, it was too unfortunate. If only your ladyship had have said . . . poor Georgiana had ought to have seen; but she never *did* have her wits about her, not for answering the door."

"But she was only obeying orders. She went to ask Mr. Jones."

Mrs. Clemm was silent. Her small hands, wrinkled and resolute, fumbled with the folds of her apron, and her quick eyes made the circuit of the room and then came back to Lady Jane's.

"Just so, my lady; but, as I told her, she'd ought to have known—"

"And who is Mr. Jones?"

Mrs. Clemm's smile snapped out again, deprecating, respectful. "Well, my lady, he's more dead than living, too . . . if I may say so," was her surprising answer.

"Is he? I'm sorry to hear that; but who is he?"

"Well, my lady, he's . . . he's my great-uncle, as

it were . . . my grandmother's own brother, as you might say."

"Ah; I see." Lady Jane considered her with growing curiosity. "He must have reached a great age, then."

"Yes, my lady; he has that. Though I'm not," Mrs. Clemm added, the dimple showing, "as old myself as your ladyship might suppose. Living at Bells all these years has been ageing to me; it would be to anybody."

"I suppose so. And yet," Lady Jane continued, "Mr. Jones has survived; has stood it well—as you certainly have?"

"Oh, not as well as I have," Mrs. Clemm interjected, as if resentful of the comparison.

"At any rate, he still mounts guard; mounts it as well as he did thirty years ago."

"Thirty years ago?" Mrs. Clemm echoed, her hands dropping from her apron to her sides.

"Wasn't he here thirty years ago?"

"Oh, yes, my lady; certainly; he's never once been away that I know of."

"What a wonderful record! And what exactly are his duties?"

Mrs. Clemm paused again, her hands still motionless in the folds of her skirt. Lady Jane noticed that the fingers were tightly clenched, as if to check an involuntary gesture.

"He began as pantry-boy; then footman; then butler, my lady; but it's hard to say, isn't it, what an old servant's duties are, when he's stayed on in the same house so many years?"

"Yes; and that house always empty."

"Just so, my lady. Everything came to depend on him; one thing after another. His late lordship thought the world of him."

"His late lordship? But he was never here! He spent all his life in Canada."

Mrs. Clemm seemed slightly disconcerted. "Certainly, my lady." (Her voice said: "Who are you, to set me right as to the chronicles of Bells?") "But by letter, my lady; I can show you the letters. And there was his lordship before, the sixteenth Viscount. He *did* come here once."

"Ah, did he?" Lady Jane was embarrassed to find how little she knew of them all. She rose from her seat. "They were lucky, all these absentees, to have some one to watch over their interests so faithfully. I should like to see Mr. Jones—to thank him. Will you take me to him now?"

"Now?" Mrs. Clemm moved back a step or two; Lady Jane fancied her cheeks paled a little under their ruddy varnish. "Oh, not today, my lady."

"Why? Isn't he well enough?"

"Not nearly. He's between life and death, as it were," Mrs. Clemm repeated, as if the phrase were

the nearest approach she could find to a definition of Mr. Jones's state.

"He wouldn't even know who I was?"

Mrs. Clemm considered a moment. "I don't say *that*, my lady;" her tone implied that to do so might appear disrespectful. "He'd know you, my lady; but you wouldn't know *him*." She broke off and added hastily: "I mean, for what he is: he's in no state for you to see him."

"He's so very ill? Poor man! And is everything possible being done?"

"Oh, everything; and more too, my lady. But perhaps," Mrs. Clemm suggested, with a clink of keys, "this would be a good time for your ladyship to take a look about the house. If your ladyship has no objection, I should like to begin with the linen."

IV

"And Mr. Jones?" Stramer queried, a few days later, as they sat, Lady Jane and the party from Kent, about an improvised tea-table in a recess of one of the great holly-hedges.

The day was as hushed and warm as that on which she had first come to Bells, and Lady Jane looked up with a smile of ownership at the old walls which seemed to smile back, the windows which now looked at her with friendly eyes.

"Mr. Jones? Who's Mr. Jones?" the others asked; only Stramer recalled their former talk.

Lady Jane hesitated. "Mr. Jones is my invisible guardian; or rather, the guardian of Bells."

They remembered then. "Invisible? You don't mean to say you haven't seen him yet?"

"Not yet; perhaps I never shall. He's very old—and very ill, I'm afraid."

"And he still rules here?"

"Oh, absolutely. The fact is," Lady Jane added, "I believe he's the only person left who really knows all about Bells."

"Jane, my *dear!* That big shrub over there against the wall! I verily believe it's *Templetonia retusa.* It *is!* Did any one ever hear of its standing an English winter?" Gardeners all, they dashed off towards the shrub in its sheltered angle. "I shall certainly try it on a south wall at Dipway," cried the hostess from Kent.

Tea over, they moved on to inspect the house. The short autumn day was drawing to a close; but the party had been able to come only for an afternoon, instead of staying over the week-end, and having lingered so long in the gardens they had only time, indoors, to puzzle out what they could through the shadows. Perhaps, Lady Jane thought, it was the best hour to see a house like Bells, so long abandoned, and not yet warmed into new life.

The fire she had had lit in the saloon sent its radiance to meet them, giving the great room an air of expectancy and welcome. The portraits, the Italian cabinets, the shabby armchairs and rugs, all looked as if life had but lately left them; and Lady Jane said to herself: "Perhaps Mrs. Clemm is right in advising me to live here and close the blue parlour."

"My dear, what a fine room! Pity it faces north. Of course you'll have to shut it in winter. It would cost a fortune to heat."

Lady Jane hesitated. "I don't know: I *had* meant to. But there seems to be no other. . ."

"No other? In all this house?" They laughed; and one of the visitors, going ahead and crossing a panelled anteroom, cried out: "But here! A delicious room; windows south—yes, and west. The warmest of the house. This is perfect."

They followed, and the blue room echoed with exclamations. "Those charming curtains with the parrots . . . and the blue of that *petit point* fire-screen! But, Jane, of course you must live here. Look at this citron-wood desk!"

Lady Jane stood on the threshold. "It seems that the chimney smokes hopelessly."

"Hopelessly? Nonsense! Have you consulted anybody? I'll send you a wonderful man. . ."

"Besides, if you put in one of those one-pipe heaters. . . At Dipway. . ."

Stramer was looking over Lady Jane's shoulder. "What does Mr. Jones say about it?"

"He says no one has ever been able to use this room; not for ages. It was the housekeeper who told me. She's his great-niece, and seems simply to transmit his oracles."

Stramer shrugged. "Well, he's lived at Bells longer than you have. Perhaps he's right."

"How absurd!" one of the ladies cried. "The housekeeper and Mr. Jones probably spend their evenings here, and don't want to be disturbed. Look—ashes on the hearth! What did I tell you?"

Lady Jane echoed the laugh as they turned away. They had still to see the library, damp and dilapidated, the panelled dining-room, the breakfast-parlour, and such bedrooms as had any old furniture left; not many, for the late lords of Bells, at one time or another, had evidently sold most of its removable treasures.

When the visitors came down their motors were waiting. A lamp had been placed in the hall, but the rooms beyond were lit only by the broad clear band of western sky showing through uncurtained casements. On the doorstep one of the ladies exclaimed that she had lost her hand-bag—no, she remembered; she had laid it on the desk in the blue room. Which way was the blue room?

"I'll get it," Jane said, turning back. She heard

Stramer following. He asked if he should bring the lamp.

"Oh, no; I can see."

She crossed the threshold of the blue room, guided by the light from its western window; then she stopped. Some one was in the room already; she felt rather than saw another presence. Stramer, behind her, paused also; he did not speak or move. What she saw, or thought she saw, was simply an old man with bent shoulders turning away from the citron-wood desk. Almost before she had received the impression there was no one there; only the slightest stir of the needlework curtain over the farther door. She heard no step or other sound.

"There's the bag," she said, as if the act of speaking, and saying something obvious, were a relief.

In the hall her glance crossed Stramer's, but failed to find there the reflection of what her own had registered.

He shook hands, smiling. "Well, goodbye. I commit you to Mr. Jones's care; only don't let him say that *you're* not shown to visitors."

She smiled: "Come back and try," and then shivered a little as the lights of the last motor vanished beyond the great black hedges.

V

Lady Jane had exulted in her resolve to keep Bells to herself till she and the old house should have had time to make friends. But after a few days she recalled the uneasy feeling which had come over her as she stood on the threshold after her first tentative ring. Yes; she had been right in thinking she would have to have people about her to take the chill off. The house was too old, too mysterious, too much withdrawn into its own secret past, for her poor little present to fit into it without uneasiness.

But it was not a time of year when, among Lady Jane's friends, it was easy to find people free. Her own family were all in the north, and impossible to dislodge. One of her sisters, when invited, simply sent her back a list of shooting-dates; and her mother wrote: "Why not come to us? What can you have to do all alone in that empty house at this time of year? Next summer we're all coming."

Having tried one or two friends with the same result, Lady Jane bethought her of Stramer. He was finishing a novel, she knew, and at such times he liked to settle down somewhere in the country where he could be sure of not being disturbed. Bells was a perfect asylum, and though it was probable that some other friend had anticipated her, and provided the requisite seclusion, Lady Jane decided to invite

him. "Do bring your work and stay till it's finished —and don't be in a hurry to finish. I promise that no one shall bother you—" and she added, half-nervously: "Not even Mr. Jones." As she wrote she felt an absurd impulse to blot the words out. "He might not like it," she thought; and the "he" did not refer to Stramer.

Was the solitude already making her superstitious? She thrust the letter into an envelope, and carried it herself to the post-office at Thudeney-Blazes. Two days later a wire from Stramer announced his arrival.

He came on a cold stormy afternoon, just before dinner, and as they went up to dress Lady Jane called after him: "We shall sit in the blue parlour this evening." The housemaid Georgiana was crossing the passage with hot water for the visitor. She stopped and cast a vacant glance at Lady Jane. The latter met it, and said carelessly: "You hear, Georgiana? The fire in the blue parlour."

While Lady Jane was dressing she heard a knock, and saw Mrs. Clemm's round face just inside the door, like a red apple on a garden wall.

"Is there anything wrong about the saloon, my lady? Georgiana understood—"

"That I want the fire in the blue parlour. Yes. What's wrong with the saloon is that one freezes there."

"But the chimney smokes in the blue parlour."

"Well, we'll give it a trial, and if it does I'll send for some one to arrange it."

"Nothing can be done, my lady. Everything has been tried, and—"

Lady Jane swung about suddenly. She had heard Stramer singing a cheerful hunting-song in a cracked voice, in his dressing-room at the other end of the corridor.

"That will do, Mrs. Clemm. I want the fire in the blue parlour."

"Yes, my lady." The door closed on the housekeeper.

"So you decided on the saloon after all?" Stramer said, as Lady Jane led the way there after their brief repast.

"Yes: I hope you won't be frozen. Mr. Jones swears that the chimney in the blue parlour isn't safe; so, until I can fetch the mason over from Strawbridge—"

"Oh, I see." Stramer drew up to the blaze in the great fire-place. "We're very well off here; though heating this room is going to be ruinous. Meanwhile, I note that Mr. Jones still rules."

Lady Jane gave a slight laugh.

"Tell me," Stramer continued, as she bent over the

mixing of the Turkish coffee, "what is there about him? I'm getting curious."

Lady Jane laughed again, and heard the embarrassment in her laugh. "So am I."

"Why—you don't mean to say you haven't seen him yet?"

"No. He's still too ill."

"What's the matter with him? What does the doctor say?"

"He won't see the doctor."

"But look here—if things take a worse turn—I don't know; but mightn't you be held to have been negligent?"

"What can I do? Mrs. Clemm says he has a doctor who treats him by correspondence. I don't see that I can interfere."

"Isn't there some one beside Mrs. Clemm whom you can consult?"

She considered: certainly, as yet, she had not made much effort to get into relation with her neighbours. "I expected the vicar to call. But I've enquired: there's no vicar any longer at Thudeney-Blazes. A curate comes from Strawbridge every other Sunday. And the one who comes now is new: nobody about the place seems to know him."

"But I thought the chapel here was in use? It looked so when you showed it to us the other day."

"I thought so too. It used to be the parish church

of Lynke-Linnet and Lower-Lynke; but it seems that was years ago. The parishioners objected to coming so far; and there weren't enough of them. Mrs. Clemm says that nearly everybody has died off or left. It's the same at Thudeney-Blazes."

Stramer glanced about the great room, with its circle of warmth and light by the hearth, and the sullen shadows huddled at its farther end, as if hungrily listening. "With this emptiness at the centre, life was bound to cease gradually on the outskirts."

Lady Jane followed his glance. "Yes; it's all wrong. I must try to wake the place up."

"Why not open it to the public? Have a visitors' day?"

She thought a moment. In itself the suggestion was distasteful; she could imagine few things that would bore her more. Yet to do so might be a duty, a first step toward reëstablishing relations between the lifeless house and its neighbourhood. Secretly, she felt that even the coming and going of indifferent unknown people would help to take the chill from those rooms, to brush from their walls the dust of too-heavy memories.

"Who's that?" asked Stramer. Lady Jane started in spite of herself, and glanced over her shoulder; but he was only looking past her at a portrait which a dart of flame from the hearth had momentarily called from its obscurity.

"That's a Lady Thudeney." She got up and went toward the picture with a lamp. "Might be an Opie, don't you think? It's a strange face, under the smirk of the period."

Stramer took the lamp and held it up. The portrait was that of a young woman in a short-waisted muslin gown caught beneath the breast by a cameo. Between clusters of beribboned curls a long fair oval looked out dumbly, inexpressively, in a stare of frozen beauty. "It's as if the house had been too empty even then," Lady Jane murmured. "I wonder which she was? Oh, I know: it must be *'Also His Wife'*."

Stramer stared.

"It's the only name on her monument. The wife of Peregrine Vincent Theobald, who perished of the plague at Aleppo in 1828. Perhaps she was very fond of him, and this was painted when she was an inconsolable widow."

"They didn't dress like that as late as 1828." Stramer holding the lamp closer, deciphered the inscription on the border of the lady's India scarf; *Juliana, Viscountess Thudeney, 1818.* "She must have been inconsolable before his death, then."

Lady Jane smiled. "Let's hope she grew less so after it."

Stramer passed the lamp across the canvas. "Do you see where she was painted? In the blue parlour. Look: the old panelling; and she's leaning on the

citron-wood desk. They evidently used the room in winter then." The lamp paused on the background of the picture: a window framing snow-laden paths and hedges in icy perspective.

"Curious," Stramer said—"and rather melancholy: to be painted against that wintry desolation. I wish you could find out more about her. Have you dipped into your archives?"

"No. Mr. Jones—"

"He won't allow that either?"

"Yes; but he's lost the key of the muniment-room. Mrs. Clemm has been trying to get a locksmith."

"Surely the neighbourhood can still produce one?"

"There *was* one at Thudeney-Blazes; but he died the week before I came."

"Of course!"

"Of course?"

"Well, in Mrs. Clemm's hands keys get lost, chimneys smoke, locksmiths die. . ." Stramer stood, light in hand, looking down the shadowy length of the saloon. "I say, let's go and see what's happening now in the blue parlour."

Lady Jane laughed: a laugh seemed easy with another voice near by to echo it. "Let's—"

She followed him out of the saloon, across the hall in which a single candle burned on a far-off table, and past the stairway yawning like a black funnel

above them. In the doorway of the blue parlour Stramer paused. "Now, then, Mr. Jones!"

It was stupid, but Lady Jane's heart gave a jerk: she hoped the challenge would not evoke the shadowy figure she had half seen that other day.

"Lord, it's cold!" Stramer stood looking about him. "Those ashes are still on the hearth. Well, it's all very queer." He crossed over to the citron-wood desk. "There's where she sat for her picture—and in this very arm-chair—look!"

"Oh, don't!" Lady Jane exclaimed. The words slipped out unawares.

"Don't—what?"

"Try those drawers—" she wanted to reply; for his hand was stretched toward the desk.

"I'm frozen; I think I'm starting a cold. Do come away," she grumbled, backing toward the door.

Stramer lighted her out without comment. As the lamplight slid along the walls Lady Jane fancied that the needle-work curtain over the farther door stirred as it had that other day. But it may have been the wind rising outside. . .

The saloon seemed like home when they got back to it.

"There *is* no Mr. Jones!"

Stramer proclaimed it triumphantly when they met the next morning. Lady Jane had motored off early

to Strawbridge in quest of a mason and a locksmith. The quest had taken longer than she had expected, for everybody in Strawbridge was busy on jobs nearer by, and unaccustomed to the idea of going to Bells, with which the town seemed to have had no communication within living memory. The younger workmen did not even know where the place was, and the best Lady Jane could do was to coax a locksmith's apprentice to come with her, on the understanding that he would be driven back to the nearest station as soon as his job was over. As for the mason, he had merely taken note of her request, and promised half-heartedly to send somebody when he could. "Rather off our beat, though."

She returned, discouraged and somewhat weary, as Stramer was coming downstairs after his morning's work.

"No Mr. Jones?" she echoed.

"Not a trace! I've been trying the old Glamis experiment—situating his room by its window. Luckily the house is smaller. . ."

Lady Jane smiled. "Is this what you call locking yourself up with your work?"

"I can't work: that's the trouble. Not till this is settled. Bells is a fidgety place."

"Yes," she agreed.

"Well, I wasn't going to be beaten; so I went to try to find the head-gardener."

"But there isn't—"

"No. Mrs. Clemm told me. The head-gardener died last year. That woman positively glows with life whenever she announces a death. Have you noticed?"

Yes: Lady Jane had.

"Well—I said to myself that if there wasn't a head-gardener there must be an underling; at least one. I'd seen somebody in the distance, raking leaves, and I ran him down. Of course he'd never seen Mr. Jones."

"You mean that poor old half-blind Jacob? He couldn't see anybody."

"Perhaps not. At any rate, he told me that Mr. Jones wouldn't let the leaves be buried for leaf-mould —I forget why. Mr. Jones's authority extends even to the gardens."

"Yet you say he doesn't exist!"

"Wait. Jacob is half-blind, but he's been here for years, and knows more about the place than you'd think. I got him talking about the house, and I pointed to one window after another, and he told me each time whose the room was, or had been. But he couldn't situate Mr. Jones."

"I beg your ladyship's pardon—" Mrs. Clemm was on the threshold, cheeks shining, skirt rustling, her eyes like drills. "The locksmith your ladyship

brought back; I understand it was for the lock of the muniment-room—"

"Well?"

"He's lost one of his tools, and can't do anything without it. So he's gone. The butcher's boy gave him a lift back."

Lady Jane caught Stramer's faint chuckle. She stood and stared at Mrs. Clemm, and Mrs. Clemm stared back, deferential but unflinching.

"Gone? Very well; I'll motor after him."

"Oh, my lady, it's too late. The butcher's boy had his motor-cycle. . . Besides, what could he do?"

"Break the lock," exclaimed Lady Jane, exasperated.

"Oh, my lady—" Mrs. Clemm's intonation marked the most respectful incredulity. She waited another moment, and then withdrew, while Lady Jane and Stramer considered each other.

"But this is absurd," Lady Jane declared when they had lunched, waited on, as usual, by the flustered Georgiana. "I'll break in that door myself, if I have to.— Be careful please, Georgiana," she added; "I was speaking of doors, not dishes." For Georgiana had let fall with a crash the dish she was removing from the table. She gathered up the pieces in her tremulous fingers, and vanished. Jane and Stramer returned to the saloon.

"Queer!" the novelist commented.

"Yes." Lady Jane, facing the door, started slightly. Mrs. Clemm was there again; but this time subdued, unrustling, bathed in that odd pallour which enclosed but seemed unable to penetrate the solid crimson of her cheeks.

"I beg pardon, my lady. The key is found." Her hand, as she held it out, trembled like Georgiana's.

VII

"It's not here," Stramer announced, a couple of hours later.

"What isn't?" Lady Jane queried, looking up from a heap of disordered papers. Her eyes blinked at him through the fog of yellow dust raised by her manipulations.

"The clue.— I've got all the 1800 to 1840 papers here; and there's a gap."

She moved over to the table above which he was bending. "A gap?"

"A big one. Nothing between 1815 and 1835. No mention of Peregrine or of Juliana."

They looked at each other across the tossed papers, and suddenly Stramer exclaimed: "Some one has been here before us—just lately."

Lady Jane stared, incredulous, and then followed the direction of his downward pointing hand.

"Do you wear flat heelless shoes?" he questioned.

"And of that size? Even my feet are too small to fit into those foot-prints. Luckily there wasn't time to sweep the floor!"

Lady Jane felt a slight chill, a chill of a different and more inward quality than the shock of stuffy coldness which had met them as they entered the unaired attic set apart for the storing of the Thudeney archives.

"But how absurd! Of course when Mrs. Clemm found we were coming up she came—or sent some one—to open the shutters."

"That's not Mrs. Clemm's foot, or the other woman's. She must have sent a man—an old man with a shaky uncertain step. Look how it wanders."

"Mr. Jones, then!" said Lady Jane, half impatiently.

"Mr. Jones. And he got what he wanted, and put it—where?"

"Ah, *that*—! I'm freezing, you know; let's give this up for the present." She rose, and Stramer followed her without protest; the muniment-room was really untenable.

"I must catalogue all this stuff some day, I suppose," Lady Jane continued, as they went down the stairs. "But meanwhile, what do you say to a good tramp, to get the dust out of our lungs?"

He agreed, and turned back to his room to get some letters he wanted to post at Thudeney-Blazes.

Lady Jane went down alone. It was a fine afternoon, and the sun, which had made the dust-clouds of the muniment-room so dazzling, sent a long shaft through the west window of the blue parlour, and across the floor of the hall.

Certainly Georgiana kept the oak floors remarkably well; considering how much else she had to do, it was surp—

Lady Jane stopped as if an unseen hand had jerked her violently back. On the smooth parquet before her she had caught the trace of dusty foot-prints—the prints of broad-soled heelless shoes—making for the blue parlour and crossing its threshold. She stood still with the same inward shiver that she had felt upstairs; then, avoiding the foot-prints, she too stole very softly toward the blue parlour, pushed the door wider, and saw, in the long dazzle of autumn light, as if translucid, edged with the glitter, an old man at the desk.

"Mr. Jones!"

A step came up behind her: Mrs. Clemm with the post-bag. "You called, my lady?"

"I . . . yes. . ."

When she turned back to the desk there was no one there.

She faced about on the housekeeper. "Who was that?"

"Where, my lady?"

Lady Jane, without answering, moved toward the needlework curtain, in which she had detected the same faint tremor as before. "Where does that door go to—behind the curtain?"

"Nowhere, my lady. I mean; there is no door."

Mrs. Clemm had followed; her step sounded quick and assured. She lifted up the curtain with a firm hand. Behind it was a rectangle of roughly plastered wall, where an opening had visibly been bricked up.

"When was that done?"

"The wall built up? I couldn't say. I've never known it otherwise," replied the housekeeper.

The two women stood for an instant measuring each other with level eyes; then the housekeeper's were slowly lowered, and she let the curtain fall from her hand. "There are a great many things in old houses that nobody knows about," she said.

"There shall be as few as possible in mine," said Lady Jane.

"My lady!" The housekeeper stepped quickly in front of her. "My lady, what are you doing?" she gasped.

Lady Jane had turned back to the desk at which she had just seen—or fancied she had seen—the bending figure of Mr. Jones.

"I am going to look through these drawers," she said.

The housekeeper still stood in pale immobility be-

tween her and the desk. "No, my lady—no. You won't do that."

"Because—?"

Mrs. Clemm crumpled up her black silk apron with a despairing gesture. "Because—if you *will* have it—that's where Mr. Jones keeps his private papers. I know he'd oughtn't to. . ."

"Ah—then it was Mr. Jones I saw here?"

The housekeeper's arms sank to her sides and her mouth hung open on an unspoken word. "You *saw* him?" The question came out in a confused whisper; and before Lady Jane could answer, Mrs. Clemm's arms rose again, stretched before her face as if to fend off a blaze of intolerable light, or some forbidden sight she had long since disciplined herself not to see. Thus screening her eyes she hurried across the hall to the door of the servants' wing.

Lady Jane stood for a moment looking after her; then, with a slightly shaking hand, she opened the desk and hurriedly took out from it all the papers—a small bundle—that it contained. With them she passed back into the saloon.

As she entered it her eye was caught by the portrait of the melancholy lady in the short-waisted gown whom she and Stramer had christened "Also His Wife." The lady's eyes, usually so empty of all awareness save of her own frozen beauty, seemed

suddenly waking to an anguished participation in the scene.

"Fudge!" muttered Lady Jane, shaking off the spectral suggestion as she turned to meet Stramer on the threshold.

VIII

The missing papers were all there. Stramer and she spread them out hurriedly on a table and at once proceeded to gloat over their find. Not a particularly important one, indeed: in the long history of the Lynkes and Crofts it took up hardly more space than the little handful of documents did, in actual bulk, among the stacks of the muniment-room. But the fact that these papers filled a gap in the chronicles of the house, and situated the sad-faced beauty as veritably the wife of the Peregrine Vincent Theobald Lynke who had "perished of the plague at Aleppo in 1828"—this was a discovery sufficiently exciting to whet amateur appetites, and to put out of Lady Jane's mind the strange incident which had attended the opening of the cabinet.

For a while she and Stramer sat silently and methodically going through their respective piles of correspondence; but presently Lady Jane, after glancing over one of the yellowing pages, uttered a startled exclamation.

"How strange! Mr. Jones again—always Mr. Jones!"

Stramer looked up from the papers he was sorting. "You too? I've got a lot of letters here addressed to a Mr. Jones by Peregrine Vincent, who seems to have been always disporting himself abroad, and chronically in want of money. Gambling debts, apparently . . . ah and women . . . a dirty record altogether. . ."

"Yes? My letter is not written to a Mr. Jones; but it's about one. Listen." Lady Jane began to read. "'Bells, February 20th, 1826. . .' (It's from poor 'Also His Wife' to her husband.) 'My dear Lord, Acknowledging as I ever do the burden of the sad impediment which denies me the happiness of being more frequently in your company, I yet fail to conceive how anything in my state obliges that close seclusion in which Mr. Jones persists—and by your express orders, so he declares—in confining me. Surely, my lord, had you found it possible to spend more time with me since the day of our marriage, you would yourself have seen it to be unnecessary to put this restraint upon me. It is true, alas, that my unhappy infirmity denies me the happiness to speak with you, or to hear the accents of the voice I should love above all others could it but reach me; but, my dear husband, I would have you consider that my mind is in no way affected by this obstacle,

but goes out to you, as my heart does, in a perpetual eagerness of attention, and that to sit in this great house alone, day after day, month after month, deprived of your company, and debarred also from any intercourse but that of the servants you have chosen to put about me, is a fate more cruel than I deserve and more painful than I can bear. I have entreated Mr. Jones, since he seems all-powerful with you, to represent this to you, and to transmit this my last request—for should I fail I am resolved to make no other—that you should consent to my making the acquaintance of a few of your friends and neighbours, among whom I cannot but think there must be some kind hearts that would take pity on my unhappy situation, and afford me such companionship as would give me more courage to bear your continual absence. . . .'"

Lady Jane folded up the letter. "Deaf and dumb —ah, poor creature! That explains the look—"

"And this explains the marriage," Stramer continued, unfolding a stiff parchment document. "Here are the Viscountess Thudeney's marriage settlements. She appears to have been a Miss Portallo, daughter of Obadiah Portallo Esqre, of Purflew Castle, Caermarthenshire, and Bombay House, Twickenham, East India merchant, senior member of the banking house of Portallo and Prest—and so on and so on. And the figures run up into hundreds of thousands."

"It's rather ghastly—putting the two things together. All the millions and—imprisonment in the blue parlour. I suppose her Viscount had to have the money, and was ashamed to have it known how he had got it. . ." Lady Jane shivered. "Think of it—day after day, winter after winter, year after year . . . speechless, soundless, alone . . . under Mr. Jones's guardianship. Let me see: what year were they married?"

"In 1817."

"And only a year later that portrait was painted. And she had the frozen look already."

Stramer mused: "Yes; it's grim enough. But the strangest figure in the whole case is still—Mr. Jones."

"Mr. Jones—yes. Her keeper," Lady Jane mused "I suppose he must have been this one's ancestor. The office seems to have been hereditary at Bells."

"Well—I don't know."

Stramer's voice was so odd that Lady Jane looked up at him with a stare of surprise. "What if it were the same one?" suggested Stramer with a queer smile.

"The same?" Lady Jane laughed. "You're not good at figures are you? If poor Lady Thudeney's Mr. Jones were alive now he'd be—"

"I didn't say ours was alive now," said Stramer.

"Oh—why, what . . . ?" she faltered.

But Stramer did not answer; his eyes had been arrested by the precipitate opening of the door behind

his hostess, and the entry of Georgiana, a livid, dishevelled Georgiana, more than usually bereft of her faculties, and gasping out something inarticulate.

"Oh, my lady—it's my aunt—she won't answer me," Georgiana stammered in a voice of terror.

Lady Jane uttered an impatient exclamation. "Answer you? Why—what do you want her to answer?"

"Only whether she's alive, my lady," said Georgiana with streaming eyes.

Lady Jane continued to look at her severely. "Alive? Alive? Why on earth shouldn't she be?"

"She might as well be dead—by the way she just lies there."

"Your aunt dead? I saw her alive enough in the blue parlour half an hour ago," Lady Jane returned. She was growing rather *blasé* with regard to Georgiana's panics; but suddenly she felt this to be of a different nature from any of the others. "Where is it your aunt's lying?"

"In her own bedroom, on her bed," the other wailed, "and won't say why."

Lady Jane got to her feet, pushing aside the heaped-up papers, and hastening to the door with Stramer in her wake.

As they went up the stairs she realized that she had seen the housekeeper's bedroom only once, on the day of her first obligatory round of inspection, when she had taken possession of Bells. She did not

even remember very clearly where it was, but followed Georgiana down the passage and through a door which communicated, rather surprisingly, with a narrow walled-in staircase that was unfamiliar to her. At its top she and Stramer found themselves on a small landing upon which two doors opened. Through the confusion of her mind Lady Jane noticed that these rooms, with their special staircase leading down to what had always been called his lordship's suite, must obviously have been occupied by his lordship's confidential servants. In one of them, presumably, had been lodged the original Mr. Jones, the Mr. Jones of the yellow letters, the letters purloined by Lady Jane. As she crossed the threshold, Lady Jane remembered the housekeeper's attempt to prevent her touching the contents of the desk.

Mrs. Clemm's room, like herself, was neat, glossy and extremely cold. Only Mrs. Clemm herself was no longer like Mrs. Clemm. The red-apple glaze had barely faded from her cheeks, and not a lock was disarranged in the unnatural lustre of her false front; even her cap ribbons hung symmetrically along either cheek. But death had happened to her, and had made her into someone else. At first glance it was impossible to say if the unspeakable horror in her wide-open eyes were only the reflection of that change, or of the agent by whom it had come. Lady Jane,

shuddering, paused a moment while Stramer went up to the bed.

"Her hand is warm still—but no pulse." He glanced about the room. "A glass anywhere?" The cowering Georgiana took a hand-glass from the neat chest of drawers, and Stramer held it over the housekeeper's drawn-back lip. . .

"She's dead," he pronounced.

"Oh, poor thing! But how—?" Lady Jane drew near, and was kneeling down, taking the inanimate hand in hers, when Stramer touched her on the arm, and then silently raised a finger of warning. Georgiana was crouching in the farther corner of the room, her face buried in her lifted arms.

"Look here," Stramer whispered. He pointed to Mrs. Clemm's throat, and Lady Jane, bending over, distinctly saw a circle of red marks on it—the marks of recent bruises. She looked again into the awful eyes.

"She's been strangled," Stramer whispered.

Lady Jane, with a shiver of fear, drew down the housekeeper's lids. Georgiana, her face hidden, was still sobbing convulsively in the corner. There seemed, in the air of the cold orderly room, something that forbade wonderment and silenced conjecture. Lady Jane and Stramer stood and looked at each other without speaking. At length Stramer crossed over to Georgiana, and touched her on the shoulder.

She appeared unaware of the touch, and he grasped her shoulder and shook it. "Where is Mr. Jones?" he asked.

The girl looked up, her face blurred and distorted with weeping, her eyes dilated as if with the vision of some latent terror. "Oh, sir, she's not really dead, is she?"

Stramer repeated his question in a loud authoritative tone; and slowly she echoed it in a scarce-heard whisper. "Mr. Jones—?"

"Get up, my girl, and send him here to us at once, or tell us where to find him."

Georgiana, moved by the old habit of obedience, struggled to her feet and stood unsteadily, her heaving shoulders braced against the wall. Stramer asked her sharply if she had not heard what he had said.

"Oh, poor thing, she's so upset—" Lady Jane intervened compassionately. "Tell me, Georgiana: where shall we find Mr. Jones?"

The girl turned to her with eyes as fixed as the dead woman's. "You won't find him anywhere," she slowly said.

"Why not?"

"Because he's not here."

"Not here? Where is he, then?" Stramer broke in.

Georgiana did not seem to notice the interruption. She continued to stare at Lady Jane with Mrs. Clemm's awful eyes. "He's in his grave in the

church-yard—these years and years he is. Long before ever I was born . . . my aunt hadn't ever seen him herself, not since she was a tiny child. . . That's the terror of it . . . that's why she always had to do what he told her to . . . because you couldn't ever answer him back. . ." Her horrified gaze turned from Lady Jane to the stony face and fast-glazing pupils of the dead woman. "You hadn't ought to have meddled with his papers, my lady. . . That's what he's punished her for. . . When it came to those papers he wouldn't ever listen to human reason . . . he wouldn't. . ." Then, flinging her arms above her head, Georgiana straightened herself to her full height before falling in a swoon at Stramer's feet. (1)

THE END

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